CINDERELLA'S DAUGHTER

and other sequels and consequences

JOHN ERSKINE

CINDERELLA'S DAUGHTER AND OTHER SEQUELS AND CONSEQUENCES

These stories are sequels to famous legends. They begin where the legends or fairy-tales stop.

Mr. Erskine's purpose was to apply a little logic to the implications of these fables, most of which have amused our nursery days. Children like stories which end with "and they lived happy ever after." Grown-ups, more than they perhaps realize, enjoy the same conclusion. It is pleasant, at least in fiction, to see life neatly finished off, with no loose ends. But this neatness can be enjoyed only in fiction. Life proceeds to consequences, even though they prove contradictory and embarrassing.

Mr. Erskine has stressed this point before. In the popular mythology, Helen went home with her husband after the fall of Troy, and since the war was over, no questions were asked as to what happened to Helen and her husband from then on. Mr. Erskine's first novel raised the questions usually not asked. The present book deals in the same way with similar material. When the Prince put the slipper on Cinderella's foot, in the old fairy-tale, all was over except the wedding; when Lady Godiva came home from her ride, the tax was remitted—and that was that. But Mr. Erskine insists on prying into the next chapter.

These continuations of old themes suggest in passing Mr. Erskine's characteristic conviction—that the old legends are true as life, and that the people in them are ourselves. In the case of two of the most provocative and stimulating stories, *Conversion* and *Peter Kills the Bear,* one suspects that he invented the legends but they seem no less true and universal.

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AND OTHER SEQUELS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Not a living being had he ever laid eyes on, going or coming from the gate

CINDERELLA'S DAUGHTER

And Other Sequels and Consequences

By

JOHN ERSKINE

With illustrations by
GRAHAM ERSKINE

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Cinderella's Daughter	11
The After-Thoughts of Lady Godiva	47
Beanstalk	79
The Patience of Griselda	119
Beauty and the Beast	157
Sleeping Beauty	193
Conversion	231
Peter Kills the Bear	267

ILLUSTRATIONS

Not a living being had he ever laid eyes on, going or coming from the gate ..... *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

During the next seventeen or eighteen years he thought of her, every now and then 12

She called for the horse and set out as soon as he had turned his back 52

Nothing more than the original lump of silver 82

Griselda came parading through the door, carrying two lighted candles 152

The great folk always had time for the common incidents of living 188

After the hundred years 206

When they made him a bishop both parents attended the consecration, Thibaut incoherent with joy, Blanche wondering whether she ought to be proud, and if so, what of 264

In a mood of depression he had the happy impulse to take himself and his cares to the white-haired priest 280

CINDERELLA'S DAUGHTER

CINDERELLA'S DAUGHTER

When Cinderella put on the slipper and the Prince announced that he would marry her, she exhibited unusual magnanimity, you remember—she forgave her heartless stepsisters on the spot, and in the exaltation of the moment invited them to take up their residence with her at the royal palace. Forgiveness admirable as it is rare—though it does seem that the Prince ought to have been consulted.

As it turned out, the elder sister was too angry to accept, and she was the homely one, anyway. Javotte, the younger, was irritated, but she had an instinct for the half loaf, and she saw a chance to be useful and conspicuous. Without guidance and advice, Cinderella wouldn't know how to behave like a Prince's wife, never in the world. So Javotte dedicated herself to the general good, and managed to give Cinderella a great deal of advice, often in the Prince's presence, during the honeymoon. At

the end of that episode she retired from the household. Cinderella, she complained, paid no attention to her. She meant, the Prince paid none.

But during the next seventeen or eighteen years he thought of her, every now and then. He half suspected the melancholy truth at last, though of course he refused to entertain it as a conviction, that she, not Cinderella, was the one he should have married. Brief as her stay had been, yet he had caught a glimpse of her quality. Cinderella had no love for ceremony; Javotte doted on it. Cinderella was restive under the rules of—shall we say, decorum? The Prince found her fascinating but a little wild. Her virtues were entangled with her faults. She had such a happy disposition that she was rarely on time. Javotte was seldom cheerful, but she was never late. Cinderella thought, apparently, that to enjoy oneself is the duty of ordinary man and the prerogative of Princes. And their wives. As though life were just going to a ball! Javotte had a sense of values, kept a sour eye on the frivolous, and never went

During the next seventeen or eighteen years he thought of her, every now and then

to a ball except in the way of duty—or ambition. Cinderella was a dear. But as time passed and he learned about life, and women, and felt the weight of his royal destiny, and thought how much better he could have played the leading part had he been supported on the scene by someone with a gift for seriousness, sympathy, and subordination—— Ah, well!

He wished Cinderella wouldn't call him Rex. She had an uncomfortable fondness for nicknames. He asked her to explain why she always addressed their daughter as Cereus. He knew it was a plant, of course, of the cactus family—not a flattering idea—but she laughed and said something about the flower, and when it bloomed. A brilliant woman, but difficult.

The daughter became a problem, or rather the central occasion for debate between them. The child really behaved well, betrayed no inordinate impulses, would have satisfied any parents whose thoughts were peaceful. She looked like Cinderella and acted like the Prince. So each believed she

needed rescue, and contended for possession of her soul. All in the happiest, most polite way, of course. He hoped, by beginning early, to prevent those whimsical characteristics which made her mother so attractive in a casual meeting and so exasperating in a permanent relation. Cinderella determined that the spark in the child should not be smothered.

"She'll never get on, your way," protested the Prince.

"What do you mean get on?" said his wife.

"I dislike a vulgar phrase," said the Prince. "Unless she is trained to it, we'll have difficulty in marrying her into a family of blood. They are few, and their standards are high."

"Cereus will marry as high as is good for her. Neither too poor nor too powerful. Neither cinders nor ceremony. There's a sad resemblance between extremes."

This was when the girl was a mere child. As she grew older the struggle became silent and more determined. It reached a climax with the Twelfth

Night Ball. She was seventeen years old, and a little more. They talked it over in the sitting-room, both rather excited, Cinderella pretending to embroider, the Prince pretending to read the afternoon paper.

"She shan't go," he said. "She's been out every night this week, and danced enough to last her for a year. That's the innocent aspect of it. She has also been out alone. What a life for my daughter!"

He turned his attention to the newspaper again, but Cinderella noticed that he had it upside down.

"Cereus can be trusted," she said. "Your daughter is a finer girl than you realize, and she belongs to a better world than you and I grew up in. But she didn't go alone—there was a very nice boy each time, the best of company."

The Prince threw down the paper and got to his feet.

"I'm too old to like this foolish talk. When I was young, no respectable girl went to a dance without proper surveillance."

"I knew of one case," said Cinderella.

She had him that time, but he resolved not to admit it. He didn't meet her eye, for fear she might make him smile. He sat down again and picked up the paper.

"It's the dance itself I object to. A harmless amusement, if you indulge at rare intervals and under the proper conditions. But it's a stimulant, you know, an intoxication. You might be stirred by the music and the swaying figures, though not dancing yourself. Sitting by the wall, perhaps."

"Yes," said Cinderella. "To the chaperons dancing may be a moral peril. That's why we ought to leave them at home."

"Don't joke about it—I'm in earnest. Even a little of that excitement may make a person go too far. It generates false vision."

Cinderella annoyed him.

"What are you smiling at?"

"Rex, did it generate a false vision in you?"

He wasn't in a gallant mood, but of course he was a gentleman.

"I don't regret it," he said.

She raised her eyebrows, and he felt it time to take a firm stand.

"The main point is that she won't——"

"She *will* go," said Cinderella. "Don't contradict me, Rex—it's unworthy of you."

"Then you go too," said the Prince. "I withdraw my objection on condition she is chaperoned."

Cinderella pretended to consider the idea.

"No—she wouldn't have a good time. She prefers to go alone."

The Prince threw down his newspaper again.

"Then *I'll* go! I've no time for such nonsense, but if you won't do your duty, I'll do it for you!"

He started to leave the room, but since she didn't say a word, he came back to see what was on her mind.

"That's a splendid idea, Rex. You ought to dance again."

"I shan't dance—I'll just watch her."

"You ought to dance. It's prettier than spying on your child. When you used to dance, you were charming, Rex."

He didn't know whether it was a compliment or criticism.

"What time does she start for this wretched affair? I counted on the evening to look over those dispatches."

"You'll be all the brighter for the exercise," said Cinderella. "Besides, you don't have to be there till eleven or so. Cereus will go earlier."

"We'll go together," said the Prince.

"It would be notice served on her contemporaries that you don't trust her," said Cinderella. "An admirable young man is taking her—I picked him out. Anyway, Rex, they can't get very deep into mischief before eleven."

"It hardly pays to go—we shall be leaving at midnight."

Cinderella saw that the battle was won.

"They stay later nowadays, Rex, but you can come home—whenever you and Cereus agree."

He left the room, not greatly pleased, and Cinderella took up her embroidery. To judge from the stitches she didn't make in it, she must have been thinking of something else. In fact, she ex-

pected her daughter any minute, and she wasn't entirely sure their conversation would be amicable. Cereus liked to have her own way, but she disliked being helped to it. No fairy godmother for her! Cinderella heard a footstep outside the door, and began to ply her needle.

Cereus entered without a word, and dropped indolently into a comfortable chair, across the room. She was color and motion, suggesting an ardent temperament which she didn't have.

"Where have you been, daughter?"

"Walking."

"Alone?"

"Mercy, no! With Charles."

"Is that the thin one with the large spectacles?" Evidently the portrait was true enough for identification. Cereus didn't like it.

"I'm sorry you walk alone—with that," said Cinderella.

"You needn't be, Mother—he's more intelligent than the other boys. You should have heard him talk this afternoon."

"What of?"

"Superstition. The persistence of it. He knows all about folklore."

"Is that superstitious?"

"You know what I mean, Mother. He was telling me the harm fairy stories do to children."

"He must be wise for his age," said Cinderella. "Let's talk of something cheerful. Your father wishes you to attend the Twelfth Night dance. We were speaking of it before you came in."

Cereus hid a dainty yawn behind a pretty hand.

"Awfully sweet of him. I don't believe I'll go. Charles asked me, but I told him what a bore it is. The music is monotonous, the men can't dance, and the older people are too grotesque."

Cinderella went on with the embroidery.

"We *do* grow old," she said, "and I suppose we *do* seem queer."

"Oh, Mother, you know I don't mean you! But the old women who sit at the side of the room and stare at you to see if your dress isn't too short, and the old men who want to be sure it is! And the ones not quite old who flirt, right in the open, and won't

admit they're doing it! I told Charles we oughtn't to encourage them."

"Not so long ago, when I was young," said her mother, "a healthy girl liked to go to a dance. But as you say, to enjoy it you must have the right sort of companion. Yesterday I had tea with the duchess, and that brilliant son of hers——"

"Tommy? Mother! I wouldn't be seen with him!"

"He's very handsome, daughter, and his manners are charming, and his dancing, you know, is the last word."

"The last time I danced with him, he kissed me."

Cinderella looked startled but encouraged.

"When was that?"

"Two nights ago. Disgusting cad!"

"I must say, daughter, if a girl will sit out dances in dark corners——"

"I never would—not with him! He did it in the middle of the floor, while we were dancing—right in front of the chaperons. He said we ought to supply them with a reason for being there."

Cinderella looked a little worried.

"Did they—did you hear any comment?"

"You needn't worry, Mother, they didn't see it. Tommy said he ought to have known—nowadays they never watch above the legs. He's vulgar."

"He seems to have a certain amount of spirit which I haven't observed in Charles."

"Oh, Charles likes to kiss me too, but he's more intelligent."

"On the whole, my dear," said Cinderella, "I think it will be safer for you to go to this dance with Tommy."

"I'm not going, Mother—I told you."

She leaned her head back in the chair, and her tone suggested fatigue in a world too frivolous.

Cinderella bit the end of a thread, and applied the eye of her needle to the moistened silk.

"You'll go to please me, daughter, I'm sure. The intellectual life is very well in its way, but I want you to know how to be young. Just because I ask it, you'll go to this dance with Tommy, and you'll enjoy it. He'll behave."

"Mother! Have you invited him already? I told you, if you did that to me again——"

Cinderella laughed.

"I'm no better than Tommy himself," she said. "You'll never forgive either of us. Yes, when I saw that charming boy yesterday, I asked him if he'd do an old woman a favor."

"And he jumped at the chance! Mother, that's not fair!"

"My dear, he's certainly quick. He has old-fashioned manners. He said he'd rather do the favor for a young woman, and he made me the quaintest bow."

Cereus stuck her feet out, let her arms hang limp, and her head droop. "My gosh!" she said.

"An unmaidenly expression," said the Prince. They looked up—he was petrified in the doorway. "And the position of your—limbs!"

Cereus drew in her legs and sat up. Her father consented to enter the room, and stood in front of Cinderella, but she had gone back to her embroidery and wouldn't look at him.

"What did I tell you?" he said.

"What did you, my dear?" said his wife.

"The deportment of youth is abominable, and our daughter seems to be one of the youngest. My gosh—was that the phrase? That's what comes of this night life." He turned sharply on the girl. "We thought of letting you go to the Twelfth Night dance, but it would be a grave error. You may stay at home till you learn not to disgrace us!"

Cereus sat up very straight indeed.

"Disgrace you, Father? You're much mistaken! I was only——"

"You're not going to the dance. That's all for the present. We'll excuse you. I've something of importance to discuss with your mother."

Cereus rose gracefully but with a certain promptness. "Don't let me interrupt."

She turned at the door, for histrionic effect.

"By the way, Father, I think I'll go to that dance. I had given it up, but now I'm going."

The Prince swallowed hard, and listened to her defiant, lazy tread as she went upstairs.

"Gross impudence, I call that!"

"My dear," said Cinderella, "you provoked it. You called her disgraceful."

"I did nothing of the kind! I only implied that she *might* disgrace us, if she weren't careful."

"Oh, was that your point? Of course you might too, my dear, unless *you* are careful."

"I always am."

"I believe you," said Cinderella, with a scarcely perceptible sigh. "You don't go in for abandon, do you, Rex?"

"Do you wish me to?"

"I'd love it! Rex—when you get to this dance——"

"Neither she nor I——"

"Yes, you will. And I hope you'll do something rash. Let yourself go!"

It was a case of persuasion by opposition. His daughter, he said positively, must stay home, but he said it too often, so she went. He had no idea of going himself, but Cinderella kept asking him how his courage was this morning, whether he still

feared what the music might do to him, and why was it so unpleasant to be spellbound a second time, until he felt his conduct would be misconstrued if he remained away.

He gave the child a fair start, as it were. She had a full hour or so at the hall with Tommy before he arrived. He expected to pause at the threshold, identify her among the dancing couples, and proceed to some post of dignity along the wall, without betraying distrust, suspicion, or lack of practice. He would then engage persons of his own age in appropriate small talk, but he would avoid any reference to the younger generation, or if the subject came up, he would be careful not to say what he thought. Toward midnight, if the dancing threatened to last beyond that hour, he would lead his daughter gracefully from the room, as a public example to other parents. He would show Cinderella he was no wet blanket on any well-mannered pleasures. That is, he would make the demonstration to his daughter, and of course she would tell her mother all about it.

But his program was hard to inaugurate. He paused at the threshold, but he couldn't pick out Tommy, and not a sign of his child. On second thoughts, perhaps she *was* there; he couldn't be sure, the way they were dancing at the moment. Perhaps hers was one of those many golden heads nestling on the right side of youthful necks. He would wait till they unwrapped themselves.

As he turned to the sedentary elders who watched from gilded chairs, he was aware of two handsome eyes on him. He had seen that face—no harm to find out where. A rather magnificent woman she was, of the long or stately kind. That is, her skirts were so long you would call them draperies, and she sat rather stiff. A good fault. Her dark brown hair was silvery in places, and there were a few lines around the eyes and the mouth, but at the moment they were not tightly drawn. Evidently a woman of character, who could unbend.

"My dear Prince, after these ages and ages!"

She bowed to him over her fan. It was Aunt Javotte.

He went suddenly weak in the knees, and wondered why. Outwardly he was calm enough. He raised her fingertips to his lips, and accepted the spacious chair fate had kept vacant beside her. Why the devil should he be so embarrassed to meet his sister-in-law? If she had left in a huff, he wasn't to blame; must he get nervous like this every time he met an offended relative of his wife?

"This is a delightful encounter, Javotte. Upon my word! And how well you're looking!"

"My health is all that could be expected," said Javotte.

"Why can't you expect any more? Been ill?"

"Health, my dear Prince—no one understands better than you—health is a state of mind."

"Oh, rather!" said the Prince. "Exactly!" He gave his attention to the dancers. Javotte fanned herself slowly and waited for him to turn around. He felt he must say something—some innocent remark which couldn't be bent back on the past.

"These young people go at it seriously, don't they! There's not a smile on the floor. Queer notion of pleasure, isn't it!"

"The word serious," said Javotte, "has various meanings. The younger generation——"

He recalled his purpose not to say what he thought.

"This is my first dance in years," he said. "The last time I went to a ball——"

Javotte's fanning became slightly tremulous.

"My dear Prince, don't I remember?"

How did he know whether she did or not? He thought it a strange question.

"You don't attend often yourself, I suppose?"

She smiled at his error.

"*Often,* my dear Prince? I haven't missed a dance, not since——" Her fan paused in its vibrations, and her voice grew soft. "Not since I left your home."

She *would* get back to that subject. Confound it! There was something wrong about the way she said "home."

"Why, I had no idea you liked it so much! If I weren't so horribly out of practice——"

"I'm sure you dance beautifully," she said. "You always did. But I don't come to dance, not

now. You and I remember the real dancing. What a delightful art it was! Nowadays—well, I come to do what I can. Our presence here steadies it a little."

Across the floor a good-looking boy threaded an adroit path through the circling couples. A graceful, rather attractive boy, the Prince thought. The graceful boy had a clear eye, an honest face, and no manners at all. He forgot to bow to Javotte.

"I say, Prince, do you know where your daughter is?"

The Prince remembered, in a panic, that he didn't know.

"You, I believe," said he, "are Tommy."

"Yes, I brought her along tonight."

Javotte gave a gentle gasp at the phrase, and the Prince put on his disciplinary mood.

"You brought her along, did you? Then, young man, I hold you responsible for her whereabouts!"

"Fair enough!" said the graceful boy. His left hand was in his trousers pocket, and with his right

he was rubbing the back of his head. "If I brought her, I oughtn't to lose her."

"Good God—don't say you've *lost* her?"

"The dance before last. A chap cut in—that stag over there——"

"Stag? Cut in?"

"And another fellow cut in on him, but he can't remember who it was. That's the last trace of her."

The Prince stood up, quite white.

"I can't believe my ears! Not a trace of her? I'll have something to say to the guard at the doors!"

The boy looked at the angry father with the patience and the pity of youth.

"The guard's all right, Prince. He won't know a thing. I just wanted to cut in myself, if you saw her going by."

Another graceful youth, with a golden head on his right shoulder, steered close to them, to see what the excitement was about. Tommy touched him on the arm, took the girl away from him with-

out a word, and disappeared with her in the turning crowd. The bereaved partner strolled toward an alcove and lighted a cigarette.

"You might as well sit down," said Javotte.

"Not till I find her!"

"Find her? My dear boy!"

The intimate form of address escaped him, her tone was so full of a vague distracting pity. Very slowly he permitted himself to collapse into the gilded chair.

"I don't like this cutting in," he said.

"Nor I," said Javotte, "but they love to do it."

"Do you know how it's done?"

Javotte stared at him a second, but caught herself.

"You saw—when Tommy carried off the girl."

"Oh, *that!* . . . You say they like to hand the girls around so, without asking their consent? A daughter of mine! . . . I'll find her at once!"

He jumped up again, but Javotte called him back.

"My dear Prince, it's no use. If you permit her

to attend these affairs, she'll do as she likes. They all do. It's sad, but it's too late. I did hope——"

Her pause had something flattering in it, a nuance in her voice as she let go of the last word, which connected her frustrate aspirations somehow with him.

"What was it you hoped, Javotte?"

"That you'd bring her up differently. I know you wanted to. It isn't your fault."

The implication couldn't offend him, because, of course, it was true. If Cinderella had had any wisdom in bringing up her child, or if she had permitted him to be wise for both of them——

The orchestra was beginning a languorous measure, hauntingly familiar. Javotte smiled at him, as if a common memory had been stirred. What a fine-looking woman she had become! . . . Ah, well! . . . He roused himself.

"I must find that child."

"It's a waltz," said Javotte.

"To be sure—I thought I recognized it."

"They have one at each ball," said Javotte, "for the older folks."

It was seductive music. He wondered if he ought to ask her. Perhaps when the crowd got on the floor—but no one started. It struck him that the empty floor went well with the luscious sounds—none of these outrageous youngsters to spoil the effect. . . . Javotte was leaning forward, ready to rise in case she should be asked.

"May I have the pleasure?" said the Prince.

Accustomed though he was to public life, he felt awkwardly conspicuous out there with Javotte. Everybody looked and no one smiled. For the first minute or two he and Javotte interpreted the rhythm differently, but she apologized and his courage returned. Now they were together! He couldn't recall whether they used to get around so fast when he was young. This speed was a bit too dazzling. . . . A few of the youngsters joined them, but with queer steps, nothing resembling a waltz, something much slower, an almost stationary swaying. It crossed his mind that he wouldn't get so out of breath that way. He would ask his daughter about it.

One of the couples swayed near as he and Javotte stormed by in their orbit.

"I say, Prince, she's all right. I found her."

The Prince stopped in his tracks. Javotte took another step, but felt herself pulled in.

"Where?"

"In the conservatory." The young couple kept on swaying.

"She ought to be dancing," said the Prince. "At a ball, everyone should dance."

"She'd rather talk," said Tommy. "The fellow who cut in was the thin one with spectacles."

"It would be interesting," said Javotte, "to know what they are talking about."

"No, it wouldn't," said the swaying youth. "I listened in a moment. It's philosophy."

It occurred to the Prince that the conversation had got away from him.

"Have we danced enough?" he said.

She allowed him to lead her to their place near the wall. They sat a moment in silence. The music was still languorous.

"What I meant to say," she began, "was that I appreciated your point of view from the first. If you had had a free hand in bringing up the child, or better still, if you had had the cooperation which should exist in the home, she would now be—what you wish her to be."

Of course she had the truth of it, but if he said anything, it might sound disloyal to Cinderella.

"Don't misunderstand," she said. He looked at her, and she touched his arm with her fan. "I spoke only because——" He wondered why she didn't get on faster. "It's nearly twenty years since we had a good talk; who knows when we shall meet again? Dear friend, that's life, isn't it! If we only had the courage to express our hearts, before the moment passes!"

He was leaning toward her, not to miss anything, and her unoccupied hand was within easy reach. Words, of course, would have been indiscreet, but sympathy passes from fingertip to fingertip, if one has the courtly technique. The gentle pressure was just being applied when he heard a modest clear-

ing of the throat beside him. He looked up and saw a thin youth with spectacles. Heaven knows how long he had been standing there.

"I beg pardon, Your Highness, I didn't mean to intrude."

The Prince wiggled his fingers a bit, for exercise, as though they had no relation to Javotte's hand.

"What's wrong with you, young man?"

"I was wondering if you knew where your daughter is?"

"I thought I did. Where would *you* say she is?"

"I'm asking you," said the thin youth. "She was in the conservatory——"

"Were you talking philosophy with her?"

"Precisely, sir, till Tommy brought in a crowd and interrupted us. I had to leave her for a moment——"

"She's probably still there, for all that," said the Prince.

"No, she's offended with me. As soon as I was free again——"

"Free?" said the Prince.

"It was Tommy's work, sir. One of the girls asked me to dance with her, and of course I had to, and when I got back your daughter was gone."

"I'll find her in a moment and take her home," said the Prince. "Obviously this is no place for her!"

He and Javotte watched the youth retire, disconsolate.

"Did he say a girl *asked* him to dance?"

Javotte smiled ever so patiently.

"My dear Prince, where have you lived all these years? Nowadays the girls propose."

"I'm reconciled to oncoming age," said the Prince. "My generation had its virtues."

"You express my thoughts," said Javotte. "There were some modern girls even when we were young, but most of us, thanks to our parents, were well brought up. As I grow older, I see it clearly. It's the compensation of age, to see clearly."

The orchestra played another waltz. He found it soothing to his nerves.

"A second time the same evening!" said Javotte. "They saw how much you enjoyed it."

He knew he ought to ask her again.

"If you don't mind, Javotte, I'd rather sit here and talk with you. One can dance any time."

She lowered her eyes, and gently opened and closed her fan.

"I love," she said, "to talk with *you*."

An unexpected impulse worked within him. He diagnosed it as an urge toward sincerity.

"Javotte, we may never have this opportunity again—I can't let it slip. Time does bring clear sight, but I won't say it brings compensations. What can atone for our mistakes?"

He drank in the music, and determined to finish up the speech.

"If I had my life to live over again——"

She sighed.

"Don't I understand—my dear . . .?"

Perhaps she said "Prince" on the end, but he couldn't hear it.

"If I had my life to live again, I'd choose wisely."

This time it was she who squeezed his hand. He was profoundly moved.

"Javotte—I couldn't say this to everybody."

"I hope not," said Javotte.

"I mean—you understand."

"I do."

She lifted her bashful eyes from the fan, and began to smile at him beautifully, but at once her face was non-committal, even a little grim. She had seen something behind him. He turned. It was his daughter.

"Father, aren't you *ever* coming home? It's past midnight."

She had a severe eye on him.

"This is your Aunt Javotte."

"How d' you do, Aunt?"

He tried to outstare the child, but he couldn't.

"Abrupt, like her mother," said Javotte.

In the carriage all the way to the palace he sounded her out, to see how long she had been

standing there, and how much she had heard.

"Did you have a pleasant evening?"

"Did you, Father?"

Now, what did she mean by that?

"Daughter, a number of young men asked me where you were. You oughtn't to hide yourself at one of these functions."

"Why, you must have seen me, Father—I was there all the time, in and out. Every time I danced past you, I tried to catch your eye, but you were talking to Aunt Javotte."

When they reached home, the man was a wreck.

Cinderella was sitting up to greet them. "I wanted to hear how the evening went, Rex. Did you feel young again?"

"Who do you think was there, Mother?"

"Who, daughter?"

"Guess."

"I can't."

"Aunt Javotte."

Cinderella laughed. "Did she talk to you, Rex?"

"We had a few words," said the Prince.

Cinderella's daughter gave a long, low whistle.

"You'd think they were two young things in the moonlight, Mother. They didn't notice my existence."

"Well," said Cinderella, "I don't blame her. Your father's irresistible—at a dance. How did *you* get on?"

"Rotten," said her daughter. "The same old story—the young people stupid, the old ones misbehaved. I'm off to bed."

The Prince went over to his desk, and with shaky hand lighted his pipe.

"I'm so glad you went, Rex."

"I shouldn't have. I knew I shouldn't. I can't afford the time."

"It's early," said his wife. "Go to bed and get at your papers in the morning."

"Didn't I say they must be looked over tonight? Here I am, up at all hours, just to satisfy your foolish whim! The child didn't enjoy a moment of it, and neither did I!"

Her face fell.

"I'm sorry, Rex. I hoped you would find pleasure in it—for old time's sake. I waited up to hear you tell me so."

He couldn't answer, and she turned toward the stairway.

"If you're going to work late, there's some cold meat in the pantry, and your favorite pie."

"I shan't eat!"

He sat himself at his desk and spread out his papers ferociously.

"The house is getting chilly," said Cinderella. "I'll bring down your wrapper."

"Don't want it!" said the Prince around his pipe. "Shan't wear it!"

She walked slowly up the stairs, and to his troubled conscience her footsteps suggested that time was passing and they had spent their youth together. He wished he might say something tender but not incriminating. He recalled the remark of his own father, years ago, that a woman forgives you more easily if you ask her a favor.

He cleared his throat.

"Cinderella—Cinderella!"

"Don't wake the house, Rex. What is it?"

"Will you bring me my slippers?"

THE AFTER-THOUGHTS OF LADY GODIVA

THE AFTER-THOUGHTS OF LADY GODIVA

PERHAPS the legend does her husband some injustice. They say he taxed his people to the point of starvation, and only by the self-forgetting heroism of his wife was he persuaded to relent. But why did it please him to impose a tax which the folk couldn't pay? Or just how did he expect to squeeze it out of them, if they were stubborn? We are forced to content ourselves with the picturesque climax of the episode. Once every day, at least, Lady Godiva mentioned the matter to the Earl, her husband, until he lost his temper. If she loved the rabble enough to ride naked through the principal thoroughfare in mid-afternoon, he would remit the tax. Well, she loved the rabble enough. She started in just above the old butcher-shop, now long since destroyed, and kept on around the sharp corner where the town pump used to be—all the way to the public jail. She made the demonstra-

tion on the thirty-first of May, to be precise, though the exact year and century escape us.

No matter how you look at the old story, the woman's exposure of herself, even in a good cause, was a little startling. Some details seem to have been invented to relieve the strain. It is said, for example, that before she started out on her canter, she informed the people of the sacrifice she was making for their sakes, and without any desire to limit their freedom of action, suggested that they might properly stay within doors, until she had returned to her clothes. Of course this warning secured for her a publicity far ahead of the times. Even though the populace did remain indoors, we may assume that she had their attention. In fact, at least one ordinary fellow did lean out of the window as she went by. The legend tells us with ambiguous felicity that he was at once stricken blind. We are expected to conclude that he was dazzled by his own immodesty rather than by hers. The account does not dwell on Godiva's personal appearance. One is tempted to call the story

bourgeois—its interest is less in the lady's beauty than in her lack of garments.

But according to another version, she did not ask the people to retire. On the contrary, she rode boldly through the streets at the hour of most congested traffic, and she had a stalwart soldier on each side of the bridle to lead the horse. Her progress, therefore, seems to have been leisurely rather than embarrassed. But she so disposed her wealth of golden hair, that no one noticed anything out of the usual. The intentions of this version are admirable, but if the townspeople were unobserving, how was her sacrifice heroic?

Other questions offer themselves. What happened after the ride? The Earl remitted the taxes, of course, but what did she say to him when next they met? What, as a matter of fact, did he say to her?

We are the answer in hieroglyphic, says the philosopher, to the questions we would put. Our observation of ourselves is proper comment upon any legend, however puzzling. It may be that the

Earl wasn't so bad after all, nor his wife so unhappy. Not at the time! The episode, however, had consequences.

Of course the Earl never thought for a moment she'd accept his challenge. He had no more relish than any other husband for seeing his wife make a show of herself. Uncordial as their relations had been when he dared her to do it, the real friction began, you might say, when she returned in triumph from the ordeal.

Her maid met her at the castle door with her best dressing-gown, the one with the ermine on it, and she would have proceeded to her room without a word if the Earl hadn't been waiting for her at the top of the staircase. In her face one could read the self-satisfaction which is permissible to a generosity like hers. The Earl looked ugly as sin.

"You seem to have enjoyed yourself," he began.

She pretended not to hear.

"I'll tell you right now, I've a good mind not to let you into the house again!" He spoke so loud that the guard on the front steps outside looked in to see what was the matter.

"If you prefer," she said, "I'll return to the streets, whither you sent me an hour ago."

"I did nothing of the kind! I told you——"

"Leofric, if you shout so loud, you'll——"

"I'll shout as loud as I like," said he, but lowered his voice. "I repeat, you undertook this disgraceful exhibition of your own free will. I shall never be able to look my friends in the face again. My wife, riding through the streets with nothing on!"

"If you'll permit me to pass," said Godiva, "I'd like to dress for tea."

He sulked till after dinner, but when they were alone once more he renewed his criticism.

"To a well-governed nature," he said, "such an escapade would have been unthinkable. Only a depraved person would have carried it out."

"Leofric," she said, "so far as I am concerned, the incident is finished. You are not a good judge of depravity or the opposite, whatever that is. Moreover, your present state of mind is not righteous indignation—it is disappointment. You

thought you had named a price I wouldn't pay. Now you wish you had stipulated something really hard."

The Earl examined the argument a second, to take hold of it by the effective end.

"I named no price. If what you did wasn't difficult for you, you're hopeless."

"As you will," she said. "I repeat, the incident is finished. Anyway, it's not on my conscience—it was your idea."

The Earl forgot his manners. He walked around the table and got near enough to shake his fist at her.

"Never so long as you live say I made you do that!"

"I shan't. Don't get excited. I said it was your idea. Of course I might have allowed the people to starve. You told me you'd be kind to them only if I rode."

"That's the way a woman makes out a case for herself!"

"Isn't it the truth?"

She called for the horse and set out as soon as he had turned his back

"It is not! You began it. You said there was nothing you wouldn't do to lift the tax."

"Well?"

"And I merely pointed out that you were exaggerating. I mentioned a number of things which no polite woman would on any account be caught doing, a series of scandalous suggestions culminating in the fantastic idea of this ride. Ordinarily I'm not given to rhetorical flights. On this occasion I exerted myself in the hope that the irony might impress you. Imagine my sensations when I learned you had called for the horse and set out as soon as I had turned my back!"

"Are you trying to deny you promised to remit the tax if I rode?"

The Earl squirmed a little. "You twist my words out of their meaning. Of course I never promised to remit the tax, and it never occurred to me that you'd make a spectacle for the vulgar."

Godiva herself was growing a little angry. "You *did* promise—the whole city knows it—you can't crawl out of it now!"

The Earl tried to collect his wits.

"The whole city knows it? How could they?"

"I told them. They understand it was a bargain. They bless me for saving them. Go back on your word now, and see which of us is unpopular!"

He turned white with rage and some other emotions. She never saw him look more wicked.

"It was like you to advertise in advance! I'm through with you, Godiva! There's only one kind of woman who'd strip in public if she got a chance. You are now free, as you suggested a moment ago, to return to the streets!"

Whenever he threatened to turn her out of doors, she always knew the quarrel was dying a natural death. Now she smiled at him.

"Don't worry, Leofric, it wasn't nearly so public as you think. Nobody saw me."

"Ah, you didn't really, after all——! Then the tax stands!"

She laughed. "Don't fool yourself—I really did. I hadn't a stitch on. But I asked the people to stay in and keep the shutters closed till I had

gone by. Even then it was unpleasant—they appreciate what I did for their sakes—but of course I couldn't have appeared so in public—if there had been a public."

"Thank heaven!" said the Earl. He sat in a deep chair and mopped his forehead. Suddenly a reasonable doubt sprang up in him.

"You say the shutters were all closed?"

"I didn't inspect the arrangements, Leofric—I merely asked the people to have the blinds down."

"Then any number of bleary-eyed, loose-tongued rascals may at this moment be discussing your person over their tavern ale."

Godiva looked resigned. "It's possible, of course. However, I count on the gratitude of your people."

The Earl mopped his face again. "I wish I were sure what they are grateful for. . . . So far as you are aware, no one saw you?"

Godiva hesitated. "Practically no one."

"What does that mean?"

"It means, Leofric, if you must know, that one

man did. I didn't wish to tell you, because you might feel upset—you have such a way of reading unpleasant meanings into the simplest accidents. But when I was rounding that corner—you know the bad spot near the pump, where you have neglected the pavements—well, just as I was passing, with my attention on the horse to keep him from slipping, I happened to look up, and there was a man leaning out of the window."

"What did you do then?"

"I rode by, of course."

The Earl gazed at her thoughtfully. "I'm sorry for that man. What does he look like?"

"I rode by," repeated his wife. "If I had stared at him, he might have thought—well, I hurried along."

"Was he, by chance, old? Gray beard, perhaps? Rather bald?"

"Oh, no, not at all! The one I mean was quite young. His face wore a beautiful expression—really inspired. It made me think of the way you feel in church."

"Well," said the Earl, "I'm glad you didn't stare at him. But it makes little difference. No living man, except your husband, has seen you as you rode. The fellow's as good as dead. We'll have him in jail by night, he'll get his trial right after breakfast, and in the middle of the forenoon we'll all go out and see him hanged."

Godiva turned a trifle nervous. "Really, Leofric, I wish you wouldn't talk that way! You sound cruel."

"I tell you, he'll hang before lunch tomorrow! Didn't you tell the people not to look?"

Godiva cleared her throat. "I only told them I thought they'd better not."

"You were right. They'd better not!"

They sat silent for a moment.

"But Leofric, I can't feel that the man did anything very wrong. His gaze was singularly respectful. It struck me at the time that he had an admirable mind. A really objectionable person might have shown some improper interest, but this one managed to look as though nothing out of the

usual had happened. In fact, he showed no interest at all."

"You're sure he saw you?"

"He looked straight at me, in a dreamy way—I've tried to describe it. I felt he was a noble man. I thought at the time, if you could have seen it as I did, you would have known the good side of the common people."

Leofric clapped his hands, and a servant appeared at the door. "Send me the sheriff!"

The servant disappeared. Godiva approached her husband with her most appealing look.

"Don't be unkind to him, Leofric! He did nothing wrong! If I chose to ride, and he happened to see me, he's not to blame. If anyone ought to be punished——"

"Of course—you ought to be! I knew you had a good time. Now you'll see what it cost the fool."

"But he didn't——"

"Oh, yes, he did! It wasn't an accident. You told them all to keep their heads in."

Godiva was very red in the face.

"Leofric, suppose it wasn't an accident, suppose his curiosity got the better of him. Isn't it wise to pretend we don't know he saw me? If you hang him, everyone will gossip—they'll think you have a personal reason for vengeance—you, a great lord, admitting you could be insulted by a mere townsman!"

"That's what they will think, my dear. Meanwhile, you will have the satisfaction of watching the fellow strangle."

The sheriff entered the hall, a swarthy, unpleasant giant, fully armed.

"Do you know the turn of the street where the paving is bad? Well, in the corner house, the one with the bay window, there's a young man with a reverent, inspired look on his face. Arrest him and put him in the dungeon. He's to be hanged tomorrow."

Godiva turned pale.

The sheriff wrinkled his brow. "Can you describe him more in particular? Several of the young men——"

"Arrest as many as you think best," said the Earl. "Tomorrow we'll pick out the one we want."

The sheriff withdrew. Leofric got up and stretched himself. It was his habit to retire early.

"I wish you wouldn't go," said his wife, "not till we have thrashed this out."

"It's thrashed, all right," said the Earl.

"But you don't understand why—why——"

"What don't I understand?"

"Leofric, these people of yours are hungry for more than food."

"Of course they are! I told you that in the first place. They wouldn't be satisfied, no matter what you did for them."

"Leofric, have you ever considered how little beauty there is in their lives? Nothing but work, and suffering, and—and mediocrity. When I saw that spiritual expression in the young man's face——"

"I'll give my attention to it tomorrow morning," said the Earl. "Very spiritual, I've no doubt."

After breakfast, he intimated to Godiva that she might retire to some other part of the castle, and as soon as she was gone, he had the sheriff in to report.

"I arrested five, altogether," said the swarthy giant. "They're all wearing that inspired expression. There's little difference between them."

"If it's possible," said the Earl, "I'd rather hang only the guilty one."

"Ah, that's easy to say, but how will your lordship distinguish? The new gallows holds six. Why not play safe?"

"No," said the Earl. "In this case I could get no satisfaction out of it unless I knew which of the five was guilty."

The sheriff showed some impatience. "If you intend to proceed like a lawyer, my lord, you'll have to accuse the man of something. I thought you just wanted him hanged."

"That's the difficulty," said the Earl. "The crime is serious, but I'm reluctant to talk about it. He would probably deny his guilt, anyway."

"Well, the gallows is ready whenever you are," said the sheriff.

Leofric studied a moment.

"Where have you put the men?"

"In the dungeon, as you told me."

"Perhaps that's not the best place for them. Take them to the town jail, and give them that top row of cells."

The sheriff seemed unwilling. "My lord, they don't need so much sunlight."

"No matter. My wife will probably visit them, as soon as she hears of the arrest. Her heart always responds to the afflictions of the weak-minded and the criminal. When she comes, let her in. If she stops to talk with any one of them, make a note of it and tell me."

The sheriff smiled grimly, and started off toward the cellar door which led to the dungeon. Leofric sat in his stately chair and meditated. He too indulged in a smile, from time to time.

Godiva stopped to whisper to her maid.

"If my husband asks where I went, tell him I

had to do some shopping. I'll try to get back in an hour or so."

The servant curtsied, and Godiva slipped through the side door of the castle and hurried toward the town. On so private an errand she couldn't call for her coach, and somehow a horse seemed inappropriate. She went on foot, dressed very plainly, with a heavy shawl over her head.

When she reached the main street, she faltered—it took courage to go on. Of course they would recognize her, and there might be a few unkind enough to imagine she had come to receive their thanks, or to discover the popular reaction. She glanced up at the narrow strip of sky, where the old houses, leaning together, almost met above her head. She wished she might have come in the dark, at night, when the town would be sound asleep. It was easier to ride, she found, than to walk.

She kept to the middle of the street, partly because the sidewalk was too narrow, and partly because the center was less muddy. Her cautious

steed had picked his way there. Women stood talking at worn doorsteps—she wondered what about. When she approached they fell silent, but never looked at her. She wasn't recognized yet. She walked faster.

On the right her favorite butcher was whistling just inside his shop. The tune was not recognizable. Behind his chopping block sturdy quarters of beef and pork hung stiff and raw. He wore an apron, for the purpose, apparently, of keeping his knife clean, and around his left thumb was a bandage, where he had missed his aim. Godiva thought she had been anonymous long enough.

"Well, madam, what will you have?" said the butcher, reaching for his saw.

"Nothing at the moment," said Godiva. "I stopped to pay last week's bill."

"Why, if it isn't my lady! I declare! You came in so quietly, I didn't recognize you. You're not alone, are you?"

"I'm walking today."

He missed the allusion entirely—perhaps be-

cause she was counting out the gold under his eyes.

"Right, my lady—thank you! I always say, if everyone paid as promptly as you and the Earl, business would be a pleasure."

Godiva tied up her purse and put it away. The butcher leaned on the chopping-block, sociably inclined.

"Any news at the castle, my lady?"

"No—none of much importance."

"Well, my lady, isn't that the best kind of life—one day like another? When I was young I didn't think so."

Godiva moved toward the door.

"I hope you'll favor us with another visit, my lady. What's this I hear about your riding down this way in the near future? We're all expecting you."

"I rode yesterday."

"Oh, was it yesterday? I thought it was next week. That's the way you get things mixed, in a quiet town like this."

Godiva gave him a wicked glance.

"I must tell you," she said, "the meat for which I have just paid was hardly fit for the table."

He looked penitent. "What was wrong with it, my lady?"

"Age. Send us no more leather!"

He stared after her, with his generous mouth agape.

A hundred yards further on, she decided to leave an order for Sunday's bread. The baker was out, but his wife presided over the loaves—a solid woman of forty or more, who could knit standing up. When Godiva arrived, she was leaning against the side of the doorway, repairing the heel of an enormous sock. At first glance she knew who the visitor was. Godiva thought her face hardened a little.

"Good evening, my lady!"

"I want a dozen fresh loaves by Saturday night. It's for the Sunday dinner, and there are to be guests. You know the kind I like?"

"Perfectly," said the baker's wife. "A dozen loaves. We have nothing that isn't fresh. I'll remember the order. Thank you, my lady."

She hadn't stirred from the doorway, nor invited Godiva to enter.

"Perhaps I'd better speak to the baker himself—I usually deal with him. Call him, if you please."

The baker's wife showed no enthusiasm. "He's not here, my lady—heaven knows when he'll return. I'll give him the message."

"In any case," said Godiva, "I'll indicate to you the size loaf I prefer."

Since she would go in, the woman couldn't keep her out. Godiva had her finger on the kind she preferred when the door opened in the rear of the shop and the baker showed his flour-dusted head. His face broke into broad delight.

"If it isn't Lady Godiva! Well, this is an honor!"

"James!" said his wife. "Your brother in the next street has just fallen downstairs. You'd better go over and see how's he's doing."

"Good Lord! I thought he had got over that habit!" said James. "I'll run around later."

"You'll run now," said his wife.

The baker made a sound, unpleasant but otherwise unintelligible, and disappeared to where he had come from. Godiva felt she ought to be moving on.

When she passed the house at the corner, she gazed up at the window from which those understanding eyes had met hers. Other men had looked at her. He had seen with the heart. She was glad she had gone riding. Of course Leofric wouldn't really hang him, when it came to the point. Odd that so spiritual a nature, so fine a taste, should reside in that shabby building! Perhaps if he had contacts with more fortunate people, opportunities to measure himself with the nobly born, he might some day rise to be a——

She was passing the candle shop. She remembered the castle was in need of candles. Besides, if Leofric enquired where she had been, it might be well to have the candle-maker's testimony. The shutters were down, but the door was open. An old man sat in the corner, with spectacles on the end of his thin nose.

"Good afternoon, Roger!"

"My lady! You take me by surprise! How can I serve you?"

"Three dozen more of the long tapers, Roger. Be sure they are all straight. You know how they burn if once they bend."

"My lady, that's the fault of the weather. This warm spring is too much for the best candles in the world."

"If you'd open the shutters and let some air into this room," said Godiva, "the spring wouldn't be so warm. Of course, yesterday was an exception."

The candle-maker was slightly puzzled. "Yesterday was unseasonable too, I should have said. But if I open the shutters, the boys throw stones at the new candles hanging up to harden. You can't be on your guard against those young rascals. The only way is to close the windows."

"Yesterday," said Godiva, "if the shutters had been open, you might have seen me riding by."

"Ah, so I understand, my lady." He smiled as though he knew more about it than she did. "Very

amusing, I'm told." He waited for her to say something.

"Three dozen," said Godiva.

"Three dozen," said the candle-maker. "I'll send them up tomorrow."

She walked to the door, and he came out to bid her farewell in broad daylight. "It's a fine old sport, riding," he said. "I wish I had seen how you do it. And there's no one like your husband, my lady, when it comes to choosing a fine horse."

By the time Godiva reached the jail, she felt discouraged. The sheriff admitted her without delay.

"I suppose you want to comfort the prisoners, as usual, my lady. There's a whole row of them who need it, waiting for execution."

"What have they done?"

"We haven't found out yet," said the sheriff, "but they're understood to be a bad lot."

Godiva heaved a sigh. "Poor fellows! I've heard something about their plight. It's really on their account I came."

The sheriff brought her to the cells. In the very first, gazing at her with the inspired expression, was the youth who had leaned from the window. She assumed a casual tone.

"I'll talk with this one, sheriff. You needn't wait."

The sheriff withdrew. He seemed pleased with himself. Godiva faced her admirer.

"Why are you here? For what crime?"

The youth groaned. "Crime? I never did a rash thing in my life! I have been an example to the neighborhood! So far as I remember, I never had a thought you couldn't quote from the pulpit! I am here because the world has gone mad."

"That's easy to say," replied Godiva. "We expect every criminal to insist he is innocent—it's a natural twist in the brain. But whether or not you will admit it, you must have done something."

He gave another groan.

"Perhaps," said Godiva, "you did something which could be criticized, but which wasn't wrong in itself—something which you prefer not to regret.

In adversity the best of us cling to our brightest memories, compensations, climaxes, achievements. Does the suggestion arouse in your conscience any appreciable response?"

"Madam, I don't know what you're talking about. I should think a bad action would always be regrettable. I've nothing to regret—unless it's the wickedness of the sheriff in locking me up here. God punish him for it!"

"I can't admire your spirit," said Godiva. "Let me illustrate my remarks. Suppose a woman, now, a fine lady, decided to sacrifice her usual reticence in order to benefit those she loved."

"The case doesn't seem specific to me, not so far," said the man.

"I'll make it clear in a minute. Suppose she does, for their sakes, what ordinarily she would consider immodest. What then?"

"I don't know what then. I never tried it myself."

"I have in mind," said Godiva, "the sacrifice which the wife of our Earl recently made, in order

to lift the tax. When did it happen? Ah, yes—only yesterday. You know about it."

"Madam," said the wretch, "I'm in serious trouble, and miscellaneous conversation is inappropriate. I don't know what the Earl's wife did, and it's surprising how little I care."

Godiva wondered whether he had recognized her, and was doing the chivalrous thing. She would find out.

"I thought everyone knew the Earl's wife rode through the streets yesterday afternoon, dressed in nothing at all."

The fellow looked interested, but not pleased.

"It's the first time I heard anything like that about her. She has the name of being a good, steady, respectable woman. I dare say you're mistaken."

"No, it's a fact."

"Well, I try to believe the best of a woman as long as I can. But if that's the way she behaves, I'm glad the Earl has to do the worrying, not I."

Godiva held on to the cell bars, to stand firm.

"She rode to save the people from the tax."

"Which one?" said the man.

"The heavy one."

He laughed.

"They're all that."

"And she told the people to stay indoors and not look at her."

He laughed again.

"Why should they? I mean, look at her? What's the point?"

Godiva lowered her voice.

"If a woman were beautiful, and her beauty encountered an admiration worthy of it——"

"She'd probably behave herself, for all that," he said. "If God had wished us to go in our skins, he wouldn't have created clothes."

"Did he?"

"Well, haven't you read the Book?"

She started to walk toward the sheriff's office, but on second thoughts turned back.

"I came only to help you," she said. "Perhaps I can guess why you are here. If you are frank

with me, I may establish your innocence. Yesterday afternoon you were leaning out of the window, in the house at the corner. Is that so?"

"*Leaning* out? I nearly fell out! I might have broken my neck. I was trying to find the door."

"The door?" said Godiva.

"Madam, I'm so near-sighted, I can't see three feet in front of me. I thought it was the door till my knees hit the sill."

"Tell the truth!" said Godiva. "You were down on your knees, gazing at the beautiful woman who once in your life, once only, revealed herself to you."

"One of us must be crazy," said the man. "It really doesn't matter which. Yes, I was on my knees. I had nearly pitched out on my head. Before getting up I paused a moment to say a prayer of thanksgiving."

On her way to the street Godiva met the sheriff.

"Well, how are your charges coming on, my lady?"

She looked out of humor even with her own charities.

"I spoke only to the first prisoner," she said. "He's a sad case. I'm quite exhausted."

"He's the one who needs you," said the sheriff. "The others are excused."

BEANSTALK

BEANSTALK

WHEN the story was first told, there was no giant in it, and no beanstalk. Jack was a philosopher. He started out with his wages, a piece of silver the size of your hand, and since it was hard to carry, he traded it for a lively horse, and when the beast threw him, he exchanged it for a cow, the cow for a pig, the pig for a goose, and the goose for a stone to sharpen knives on. When the stone made his hand rough, he threw it into the river, and ran home to tell his mother how easily, if only you know how, you can be rid of possessions, which are a care.

What his mother thought of it, this version does not say.

Or, if you prefer, you can start him off with no wages at all, and no horse—just give him the cow, and let him go to market to sell it. The first thing you know, he'll meet a tall man with a mean glint

in his eye and a few colored beans in his hand, and he'll trade the cow for the beans. When his mother sees how he's been cheated, she'll call him a fool and throw the beans out the window. Next morning they will have sprouted a magic stalk, thick as a tree, reaching to another world entirely—to the land of the rich and cruel giant, who has a hen which lays golden eggs, a harp which plays itself, and a fat bag of money.

Just to see what is at the top, Jack will climb the stalk, and at great personal risk remove the treasures, one by one. On his third and last visit, you'll have to tell how the giant woke up and came after,—indeed, would have overtaken and put an end to him, if the boy, in the nick of time, hadn't slid down the vine, seized an axe, and chopped the stalk through at the roots. In the course of nature, the giant will try to use the same staircase, the thing will give way, and he'll break his neck.

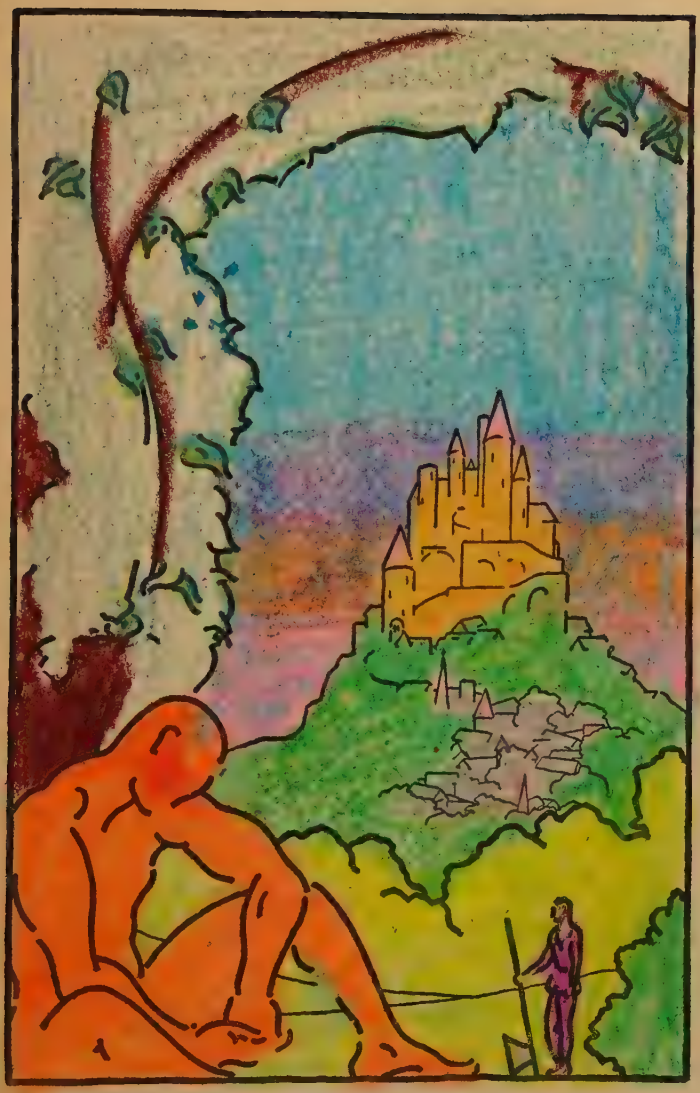
It all depends how you begin the story—and how far you carry it. This second version is the one children like, and those of their elders who

admire a good turn of luck and aren't accustomed to giants. So long as you think of the giant as a foreigner, there's little to take exception to in the way he's treated—but you may wish Jack's mother had come off better. It's not what's said about her, it's the questions that bristle on the very stem of the story. If she had been a good manager, would they have been so poor? Did she put off selling the cow till it was too late? Did she really think Jack could make a better bargain at the market, or was she ashamed to go herself—the cow being too old for milk or meat, and none too promising for leather? And if he traded the horned wreck for a handful of beans, was it he, anyway, who got cheated—beans having, merely as beans, a high nutritive value?

But as a matter of fact, the second version and the first are the same. If the first makes Jack somewhat simple, it gives him the kind of folly which is wisdom in disguise, a hunger for that border of experience which is nearest to experiment, and a hopeful disposition, which is the main heritage of

poets. If the second version puts him in a bad light and raises a sad slur or two on his mother, it's because some cautious myth-editor doubted that a lad of his exuberant temper could ever earn the lump of silver, to start with; the utmost that could be conceded was a cow belonging to someone else, and not a very good cow. Then to bridge over the gap between the cow and wealth, this unknown feeble-wit invented the beans and the giant.

Well, he wasn't the first nor the last who barked his shins trying to put logic into a stretch of poetry. No sooner had he contrived the giant than he feared we might side with him, because of a conventional prejudice in favor of property rights and against murder. So he invented an old hag, and set her on a rock, where she could waylay Jack the first day he climbed up the stalk. She told the boy to go right in like a man and make free with anything he could find, since the giant had stolen it himself from someone else. She ought to have said no more, but she added a word and gave her case away—she said the giant had stolen his treasures



Nothing more than the original lump of silver

from Jack's own father. If that had been true, the boy wouldn't have been hearing then for the first time of the hen and the harp.

No, the giant was a literary error. If you can't get him out of your mind, it's best to remember he's nothing more than the original lump of silver, honestly come by, and if you don't believe it, read on past the beanstalk, clear to the end of the tale, and see how Jack, as in the first version, slipped clear of temptation and went hot-foot after wisdom, and how his mother stood it as well as she could.

To begin with, the neighbors thought well of her, and Jack was a hero. Why shouldn't he be, with the evidence lying around, as it were—the treasure on the kitchen table, where anyone could examine it, for the asking, and the giant stark in the back yard, clamoring to be buried? They all gave the boy a hand, digging the grave.

But just when they had got the giant in and were covering him up, along came a tall fellow with a cart, and on it a dead cow.

"Give me back the beans," he cried, "or I'll

thrash a little honesty into you! Hardly had I dragged the creature to the stable door, when she——"

Jack tossed him the biggest piece of gold in his pocket, and before the fellow was finished trying his teeth on it, the boy had the carcass out of the cart and into the grave on top of the giant.

"It's well we dug it deep enough for two," said he, busy with his shovel again, as though it were what you might expect. But before the cart was well down the road, his mother was out of the kitchen and up to her ankles in the dirt beside him.

"Have you any gold left in your coat?" she said. "I'll take it into the house, where you can't throw it away!"

"I was but making good on the cow, Mother."

"And whose cow, I'll ask you? That wasn't the one you took to market!"

"Wasn't it?" said he. "Well, I've shown myself an honest man, and for that, one cow is as good as another."

It was only a few days later that he got the idea

of selling the old house. It came to him when his mother complained, as she might, of the way the neighbors kept calling on her, to look at the remnants of the adventure.

"We owe it to ourselves," said he, "to live well."

"But why not live well here? With the gold in the bag, all we need now is quiet!"

"Ah, Mother, once you start, there's no turning back. The gold in the bag means a place waiting for us, among our natural companions, in the society of the refined."

So he made it clear it was time for them to move, and what with what was buried in the back yard, they sold the cottage for no better than cemetery rates.

No sooner had they found them a fine mansion, in another county, than they had their heads together, one evening, over the best way to be what they should.

"It's hard to lay anything by, my son, while you've too little for your needs, but with all this in our hands, we'll have the fat of whatever we want,

thank God, and something over for a rainy day. How much did you say was in the bag of gold?"

"I can't rightly make out, Mother—my head gets dizzy with the figures, but it will be easier to count before long, when we've made the last payment on the house."

"Isn't that made yet?" said she. "Be quick about it, son! I've no taste for a debt."

"As to payment," said he, "there's no hurry at all. The man was lucky to sell to folk like us, with the cash ready, and I've heard a house is better with a little money owing on it—it's quicker to sell, in case you wish to."

"We'll never wish to! It's here you'll bring home your bride, as soon as I pick her out, and your children and theirs after them will be making themselves cozy under this roof."

"The bride I've thought of myself," said he, "and the children will follow, but I've the idea, as I told you, that once you've started, there's no turning back. In a little while this house will be too simple for us—we'll be moving up where we belong."

"May it be so," said his mother. "Meanwhile, will you put your mind on how to get a good start with the people around here of the better sort, without spending too much money on them."

The mention of money called out the genius in him.

"Give them a banquet, Mother, like what you hear of in stories, with the servants bringing in cooked peacocks on silver trays."

"We've neither the trays nor the peacocks," said she.

"But we've the gold to buy them, and it would be a saving in the end to spend a little in the beginning. We needn't ask them to dinner again, or not for a long time, and meanwhile ourselves will be dining out, eating back what we spent."

"That's an idea, too," said she, "if they remember to ask us."

"And after dinner," said he, "we'll have the harp play to them, and the hen will lay for each a golden egg."

"Now, why that?"

"Well, wouldn't you give them a favor of some sort? And what's cheaper than this, since the hen does it for nothing? And when it's our turn to dine out, they'd be mortified to give us anything of less value—we'll come home with an ache in our arms, lifting the jewels and the works of art."

"You're a comfort to me," said his mother. "We'll have a banquet tomorrow."

"Oh, not before a week or two," said he, "for we'll both need some clothes. If I don't wear silk breeches, I might as well eat my food alone, and it wouldn't be decent for you to show yourself at table in a gown like that you have on, with all the cloth in the wrong places."

So they asked the guests, and hired the cooks, and set the tailor to work, and every day Jack would tell the hen to lay a golden egg or two, to be sure she hadn't forgotten how. Nothing you could improve on—a smooth life for both of them—except that they hadn't been able to find the peacocks, not in the number desired, nor of the right breed for the table. They could have served

pheasants instead, but in the gush of his enthusiasm Jack had let it out that peacocks there would be, and the guests were coming to see the birds, as much as anything.

A few days before the dinner a stranger knocked at the door, a tall young fellow, with a sharp glitter in his eye.

"You wish a word with me?" said Jack.

"I'm here to answer your advertisement for peacocks."

Jack drew a breath and spread himself out in a smile.

"Then you have them? I knew someone would!"

"It depends on how many you want."

"There'll be forty-three of us at the table, if they all come."

The fellow calculated.

"Assuming normal appetites, that's a dozen birds."

Jack was disappointed.

"Twelve may be enough for food," said he, "but I was hoping to make a bigger show of the proces-

sion, when the platters come in. In my mind I saw twenty, or at least fifteen."

"It's for you to say," said the man. "I'll provide twenty, and you can eat them cold, or they'll go into a soup or a pie."

"Twenty's about right," said Jack. "How much are they?"

The man named a price.

Jack's mother, coming out of the pantry unexpectedly, heard it.

"Will you just say that again?" she asked him.

He said it again.

"It's peacocks we're asking for," said she, "not phœnixes."

"I know what you want," said the man, "and if you can find it cheaper elsewhere, good luck to you, but the market price of the edible peacock is what I'm quoting, and I ought to know, for not a soul but myself has any to sell."

The way he spoke, and that glitter again in his eye, made Jack wonder if they had met before, but his mother's way of glaring at the man weakened his nerve a bit, and distracted his attention.

"If they cost as much as that," said he, "perhaps they're too expensive to eat."

"They would be," said the man, "for any but you."

"Mother," said Jack, catching the compliment in his tone, "for any but us they would be too expensive! Bring me fifteen. I'll cut down the procession—it can go around the table twice."

He had the fellow into his office, and counted out the price of the peacocks.

"By the way, since you know about birds, there's another matter. I've a hen which lays golden eggs, and I don't think she looks as energetic as she should."

"What do you feed her?"

"The usual thing—corn, and what worms she can pick up."

"There you are!" said the fellow. "For golden eggs you need a special diet. Could I have a look at the bird?"

Jack took him to the hen house, and there was the creature just outside the door, leaning up against the wall, as though needing a rest.

"You can see what's worrying me," said Jack, "and with visitors coming in a few days, we'd like her to perform."

"It's a clear case," said the man. "I'll send a bag of feed tomorrow, and let her have a quart twice a day."

The night of the banquet the guests came early, eager for a glimpse of the woman and her son. The young were curious about Jack, but their elders thought the woman would be more worth while, for when you come right down to it, a boy is no better than his bringing up.

Jack and his mother shook their hands in the drawing-room and the library, where the talk was so cheerful they couldn't hear a word. When dinner was served she took the arm of a mature gentleman, whose face was set off by the scar of a sword-cut across one eye. He happened to be the Count, quite a man in the district, but a widower and short of funds. Perhaps she wouldn't have chosen him if she'd been quick about her etiquette, but he was there at the moment and offered his

elbow. Jack led in the daughter of an Earl, not because he knew who she was, but because he liked her looks. She parted her dark hair in the middle of her brow, and most of the time glanced down, to show her lashes. She had a white skin and a blue dress. When you talked to her she bent her head on one side, as though she'd hate to miss anything, and she'd repeat your last words, to get the full gist of them. In the strict order of precedence, Jack might very well have taken in her mother, but he let his eyesight be his guide, and put the Earl's daughter down at his right hand, where they could both survey the other guests sorting themselves.

His mother and the Count improved the moments.

"We're delighted to welcome you to the neighborhood, madam. My one regret is that I couldn't offer you a banquet myself before your invitations were out, but since my wife died, the housekeeping in my home has more or less disintegrated. A woman is absolutely essential."

"I'd like to see your castle," said she. "Per-

haps I could give you a few practical hints. How long has your wife been dead?"

"Ten years, and the place has gone down-hill ever since."

She wagged her head sidewise, sympathetically.

"Not that it isn't worth looking at, even now," he added, "but it's nothing to what it was. The kind of estate you'd expect with an ancient title like mine."

She nodded up and down, to show she understood what that kind would be.

"The thing for you," said she, as innocent as a child, "is to marry some competent person with a turn for management, who would bring a bit of dowry with her."

"Very practical," said the Count, "and I've had my eye out, but I'm hard to suit, what with an instinct I've inherited for the higher values. If I must spend the rest of my days with a woman, I'd like a little charm."

He smiled as though she had charm enough, and maybe he thought she had, his sight being damaged.

Anyway, the soft tone he used, you could just hear his heart gurgling out of him.

"That would be the minimum requirement," said she, gurgling back. The side of his foot touched hers under the table, but she didn't mind.

Meanwhile the Earl's daughter was drawing Jack out.

"And I suppose he struck at you with his club, and you slipped from under, then you thrust your rapier right into him. That's what they do with giants."

"No," said Jack. "He had no club and I no sword—at least not then. It was one of the first things I bought."

"Bought it?" she cried. "You inherit a sword—you can't buy one!"

"Can't I!" said Jack. "I did."

She began all over again.

"Just what was your method of killing him?"

"I cut down the beans."

"Beans?"

"Yes. When he climbed down, I——" His

right hand indicated the amputation of the vine, and sketched in air the convolutions of a falling giant.

She sighed.

"It's not at all the way I heard it. We thought you met him in a duel, face to face."

"Thank heaven, no!"

Her eyebrows rose, and she helped herself to salt for her celery.

"Just how do you pass the time yourself?" he went on, to show he had a broad interest.

"Oh, I hunt with Father, and embroider with Mother, and help the cook, and what time's left I dance or walk in the garden or listen to minstrels."

"I'm thinking of marriage," said Jack—"that is, as soon as I can locate a girl I'd be willing to tie myself to. Since you know the neighborhood, perhaps you might help."

"It's a matter you'll have to help yourself in."

If she was as clever as she looked, wouldn't she take the hint? She glanced down and he wasn't sure but she was laughing at him, but that would

be a good sign. So he slipped his foot over till it touched hers under the table.

"I beg your pardon!" said she, and drew her shoe up under her.

"There's no reason to," said he, and felt he was doing nicely. For a while he let well enough alone.

"You spoke of minstrels—you're fond of harp-playing?"

"Very!" said she.

"It's a passion of my own," said he, "and maybe you'd give an opinion of my skill."

"Do sing for us!" said she—"a fine ballad right in the middle of the dinner!"

"Ah," said he. "Never mix the arts! I don't sing and play at the same time, and the way I play——"

He leaned across her plate and told his mother he would have in the harp, to brighten the meal.

"After the peacocks," said she, "or you'll spoil the effect. The cooks are lining them up now, behind the pantry door."

"Peacocks, did I hear you say?" asked the Count.

"It's a little something extra," said she, "by way of a tid-bit."

With that the fifteen were carried in, up and down the room twice. One guest asked what it was all about, and another clapped his hands, to play safe, and gradually the applause became general. Then the servants sharpened the carving knives and the guests tried to eat what they got. The Earl's daughter lifted a morsel to her lips, and then lifted it down again.

"Do they admire the taste of it in your country?"

"The best families do," said he, "but it's a refinement."

"That's it," said she. "It needs cultivating."

With the silence that had fallen on them all, and their knives idle on the plates, he saw it was the moment for the harp, and when they brought it, he stood it up in the center of the table before him.

"I thought you were going to play it," said the Earl's daughter.

"I am."

"Then I'll pull back my chair and give room for you to swing at it!"

"Stay where you are," said he, "and you'll see how it's done."

Then he called to the harp to begin, and the most educated music came out of it, the kind that everybody knew they ought to try to like. But the Earl's daughter put on a hard look.

"If it isn't one of those new machines! I thought you could play like an artist, with your hands."

"When it comes to that, isn't it a greater miracle to play with no hands at all? Just listen to what you'll hear this time."

"What's the name of the piece?"

Jack scratched his head.

"I never know in advance—wait and see what we get."

She listened till the harp was quiet.

"And is this one of the things that belonged to the giant?"

"It is."

"I dare say he knew more about it," said she, with a nasty twist in her voice, and she turned to have a word or two with the young man who sat on the other side of her.

The Count had better manners.

"That's a clever machine yonder," said he to Jack's mother, "and I dare say the value of it runs into figures."

"Doesn't it though!" said she. "I don't know where there's another like it, nor what price would be on it if there were."

"It's a handy thing about the house," said the Count, very thoughtful, "when you wish to take your ease and cheer yourself with a tune. Does it belong to you or your son?"

"The way we've divided the property," said she, "it's his, since he has an ear."

The Count looked disappointed.

"Ah—you've divided the property!"

"Yes, he gets the harp and I take the hen."

"I can't believe you've only one hen!"

"One's enough," said she. "You may judge for yourself."

So she told the servants to carry off the harp, and in three minutes they were walking in again with the bird on the platter, so if you weren't quick

you might think it was another peacock, and one man groaned, forgetting he wasn't at home. The creature stood in the middle of the table, flapping its wings. "Lay!" called Jack's mother, as though she were ordering a regiment. Plump! Right in front of the Count, there was a golden egg on the table-cloth. Everyone stood up to have a look, and the way they applauded this time, you could tell the evening was beginning to be a success.

"Move her along, Jack," said his mother, "and we'll see what she'll do for the next one." So he pulled the hen toward him by the tail feathers, and his mother shouted the order, and there on the cloth in front of the Earl's daughter, was a second golden egg.

"How interesting!" That's all she said, and she didn't touch it.

"It's gold," said Jack, "and you're welcome to take it home."

"Really!" said she, as though she didn't care for money with her meals.

But he paid no attention to her, being lost in the

thrill of the egg-laying, all down the end of the table and up again on the other side.

When the hen had laid twelve eggs in a row, she began to look tired.

"Let her rest a moment, Jack," said his mother. "There's something inside that needs it."

But what with the natural haste of youth and the spiritual intoxication of the moment, he couldn't stop to humor a hen. "Lay!" he cried, for the thirteenth time. The bird rolled her eyes, gave a noise like the cracking of the spring of a clock, and toppled over in front of him, with a farewell flick of her feathers.

"Now you've gone and done it!" exclaimed his mother, forgetting where she was. "You've no sense in your head, and if by luck you get out of one scrape, you tumble in next minute worse than ever. Couldn't you hold your tongue, and let the creature get her wind?"

"And how was I to know she'd give out on us?" said he, not liking to be shown up before strangers. "On the giant's table she laid an egg every time he

yelled at her, and 'twas he got out of breath first."

"Well, you're no giant, God knows," said she.

"It's the feed the man brought her!" said Jack.

"It's what?" said she.

He told her of the diet the peacock-seller had advised.

"And did you give the stuff to the bird when my back was turned?" said she. "And without knowing what it was? You're a fool!"

She began to cry, but the Count slipped his souvenir into his pocket and told her not to be disturbed by a pleasant accident like that, which would give variety to any evening. At the same time, he pulled his foot away from hers, and when they took up the conversation again, she found he was interested in nothing but politics.

The twelve who carried away favors said little afterwards about the time they had had, but the ones who hadn't yet been reached when the hen expired, took it out in criticism. The Earl's wife gave the Count a lift home in her coach, since she and her daughter took up no room to speak of.

"If I ever live to forget that evening!" she began.

The Count was pulling his coat-tails around, where the golden egg wouldn't seem so hard against his spine.

"Whatever did you get out of that clown of a son?"

"He stepped on one of my new evening slippers," said her daughter, "and I learned to think well of the giant."

"You must have enjoyed the old woman's temper, my dear Count, when she began to shout at her son like a fish-wife!"

But the Count was too true a gentleman to discuss his hostess—not till he'd had the egg weighed, anyway.

When Jack and his mother were left alone that night, she threw herself into a large chair.

"Thank God it's over! Now, if you can let us rest in peace for a while——"

Jack sat down on a handsome oak chest opposite her and wiggled his feet back and forth.

"We can't expect to master the trick of it the

first time," said he. "Who was the old man sitting next to you?"

"I didn't catch the name. Who was the silly thing *you* were talking to?"

"You've said it—no brains at all. I couldn't pull an idea out of her, and when the dinner was over, she left the golden egg on the table cloth."

"Who got it, then?"

"One of the other guests."

They said nothing for a moment.

"Mother, did you tell the servants what to do with the hen?"

"What matters what they do with it?"

"I'd rather it didn't go out with the ordinary garbage."

"My, but it's a delicate spirit you have!"

"You needn't be so sarcastic—it wasn't my fault it died!"

"Wasn't it! Feeding it the poison that fellow gave you, so innocent and trusting you are!"

"Confidence in one's fellow man is never misplaced," said Jack, his best side uppermost. "I'll have a talk with him."

"You'll need to!" said she.

A week after the banquet the man called again at the house. Jack saw him coming, and met him at the door.

"Since I had to pass this way," said the fellow, "I thought I'd ask if you want any fowl. As you know, I can fill your order promptly, and I hope you were pleased with what you got the last time."

"Pleased!" said Jack.

"Didn't you care for them?"

"We didn't!"

"I thought they wouldn't," said the fellow, "but it was handsome of you to revive the old customs. It's an age since anyone around here has eaten peacocks—except in poetry."

"If you'll step inside the door and take a seat for a moment," said Jack, "there's a question I'd like to discuss with you more in detail."

The man went in, as easy as you please, and helped himself to one of the best chairs.

"Now," said Jack, "I've an account to settle with you. The hen is dead."

"The one that laid golden eggs?" said the man, just to be precise. "Well, they rarely last long. They're too highstrung."

"Let that be as it may," said Jack, "but you sold me that meal to feed it, and you're answerable for the result."

He noticed a glitter again in the fellow's eye.

"Ah, but you consulted me too late! She was leaning against the house, you recall, when I first saw her. Her best days were over."

"That's not for you to say," said Jack, almost annoyed at his indifference. "If I'd kept on with a little corn, from time to time, she'd have come round, but goodness knows what poison you sold me."

"It wasn't poison, it was dry beans."

Beans! He recognized the fellow—the man who had bought the cow! Nothing could be more obvious—the dreadful peacocks—the dead hen—he had his revenge!

"If you know as little about feeding cattle as chickens, I don't wonder the cow died."

The man smiled.

"Cows aren't in my line."

"Didn't you buy my old cow?"

"I may have," said the fellow, still smiling. "That's no proof I understood cows—on the contrary!"

"And you brought back a carcass which I paid you for, in good gold!"

"Why on earth did you do that?"

Jack couldn't remember, exactly.

"I didn't ask you to, did I?"

"Don't get away from the subject," said Jack. "You admit I paid for it?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Then you can pay for the hen."

"That's a bit hard," said the fellow, "though the principle of it is sound enough. I don't admit responsibility for the hen's death, but I see your argument in advance—you'll say it wasn't necessarily your fault that the cow didn't last longer. And since you paid, I should."

"I couldn't have stated it better myself."

"The difficulty will come," said the man, "when we try to calculate the value of the hen. We ought to take the normal life of the creature, and I don't know what that would be for this peculiar breed. Then we should know the number of eggs per day, and the value of each egg. It's complicated."

"Well, as to the individual egg, I'd say the gold was worth about ten pounds, wouldn't you?"

"I would not," said the man, "but then, I'm the one who is to pay, and naturally, I'd be conservative. You've had the eggs appraised?"

"No, I'm just guessing, the way you put a value on the cow."

"To be sure," said the man. "Let's cut it in two and say five pounds."

"And the normal life of a hen," continued Jack, "I'd put at three years."

"One and a half, let's say," corrected the man.

"That's about four hundred and forty or fifty days, somewhere around there," said Jack, "and at ten eggs a day——"

"Never! No hen could—it can't be done!"

"Well, she laid twelve that evening."

"And no more thereafter, you recall."

"Make it four hundred days, for round numbers," said Jack, "and ten a day at five pounds each. That comes to——"

He tried to do the sum on his fingers.

"Twenty-thousand pounds," said the man. "A lot of money."

He didn't look worried, as Jack thought he should. They eyed each other a moment.

"It's a lot of money," said the man, "but if it will make you feel more comfortable, I'll pay it. I can see how it will come in handy when you give your next banquet."

The man took out his purse and began to count, but suddenly he stopped.

"If you'll wrap up the hen, I'll take it along."

"My dear friend," said Jack, "we didn't preserve the corpse. It went out with the garbage the next morning."

The man put back his gold, in the best of humor, and tied up the neck of the bag.

"When you bought back the cow, you got what you paid for. If I'm to buy the hen, it's a pity it went out so casually. The next time, save it. A pleasant morning to you!"

The next time! Jack said the words over to himself. The next time! It was the turning point in his career. If you don't feel the lift his soul got out of it, it's because you're trained to look only at the excrescences of experience—giants, beanstalks. But what's all that compared with having a second chance?

By the time his mother came in from shopping, he had a large scrap of parchment covered with figures. He had been adding and subtracting, and though none of the results were cheerful, he was smiling up one side of his mouth and biting his pencil on the other.

"What's the news with you?" he said.

"Nothing to be proud of," said she. "In the village they think we're made of gold, the butcher puts up the price on me every time I give him an order, and no one asks us out for a meal."

"While you were gone," said he, "I was wondering whether that's of any importance. To pass the hour pleasantly, I've been counting what's left of our gold, and about thirty minutes ago, I had an idea."

"Oh, did you?" said his mother, not excited.

"It's time to dispose of this house," he said, "and move into a better one."

"Are you mad?" said she.

"We'll sell off this house now, go back to the old cottage, and get rid of what's left in the purse."

"God save my wits!" said she.

"I've just had a chance to make ten thousand pounds, but it was better to let it go by—in the cottage we shan't need it."

"You let it go by!" she shrieked at him. "You're a fool!"

"We'll put a sign out on the front lawn this afternoon," said he, "and as soon as we've sold the place we'll go home. There was a man talking with me this morning, and I had a light from heaven."

With his sudden pig-headedness, what could she do but go? When they came in sight of the old cottage, her heart ached with pleasure, for after all, she had the feel of the place in her bones, and you can't walk out of your own door without leaving something behind.

"It's a good spot!" said she.

"I was thinking so," said Jack.

"What's that line of people in the front yard?"

"I was asking myself that," said he.

Well, to put it in a word, the rascal who owned the house now was charging sixpence for a look at the stump of the stalk, and the place where the giant was buried. But it wasn't the stalk he showed, but the roots of an elm, and he had got the giant's grave on the wrong side of the house, because that way the visitors wouldn't step on his vegetable garden.

Toward the close of the day, when the crowd had gone, Jack made him an offer.

"I'd rather not sell it back to you," said the man, "but if you must buy it, I'll have to ask

something for the goodwill of the business, and what I probably should have made if I had kept the place."

"How do you figure it?"

"Well, I'll take the normal number of years I might expect to live, and the average number of persons a day, at sixpence a head, with an allowance for bigger patronage as the shrine becomes famous."

"What's the normal number of years?"

"Seventy," said the fellow, "but my father died of an accident at ninety, and living this quiet life, I'll probably avoid the accident."

"Make it eighty," said Jack.

"I'm thirty-five now. That's a clear prospect of forty-eight."

"Let's say forty—it will be easier to figure."

"Well—forty times three hundred and sixty-five——"

"In such calculations," said Jack, "three hundred is the usual number. Forty times three hundred is twelve thousand."

"And a hundred people at sixpence——"

"Are there always a hundred?"

"A hundred for round numbers," said the man. "That's fifty shillings or four pounds and something over, which makes—we might as well say fifty thousand pounds."

"You can say it if you like," said Jack. "I've two hundred pounds in my purse. You may have half. Otherwise you can entertain callers at sixpence a head till the end of time."

"Well," said the man, "if you're talking business, and it's cash down——"

When Jack and his mother had the place to themselves, she looked at the floor where tourists had been tracking through, and she began to cry.

"What's into you now?" he said. "I'm so happy I could dance!"

"You could, could you? And nothing between us and starvation but a hundred pounds?"

"A hundred pounds, and no debts?" said he. "Could we want more? Get into bed, Mother—what you need is sleep."

True enough. She slept so sound, it was broad day when she woke up—such a day as the one when she saw the beanstalk out of her window. Now, tethered to the stump, was a fine old cow, stiff in the left front leg, and Jack looking proudly at it from all sides.

"You see, I've lost no time," said he. "I bought her before dawn."

With a sudden fear on her, the poor woman stepped into the kitchen, to have a look at the family purse. It was empty. Jack came around to the door, to see where she had gone. You could know from his face, the joy of life was in him.

"Just watch what I make on her this time!" said he. "I'm off to market now!"

THE PATIENCE OF GRISELDA

THE PATIENCE OF GRISELDA

She was, for all time, a model wife. When the Marquis of Salusse, her self-appointed husband, could invent no further proofs of docility in the home, he put her to a last and public torment—he led her to the spot in the road where he had first discovered her charms, the day she was tending her father's sheep, and he ordered her, in so many words, to get out of the fine clothes she was wearing, which didn't become a peasant woman, and cover herself again with the rough thing he had found her in, a one-piece garment. Since he had brought along the court to witness the ordeal, and a local crowd had gathered besides, there were enough eyes on her, but she did as she was told, knowing it must be for the best if he said so; she stripped then and there, but with forethought, so that no one of her lovely things touched the dust, and she folded each separately, and handed it to

the nearest lord for safe-keeping. Then she slipped the tattered frock over her head and stood barefoot, looking up at the Marquis on his horse, to see what he wished her to do next.

"You may now go home to your father's hut and stay there," said he, enunciating the words in his most cultivated tone. "I've given you a fair trial, but you're no wife for a gentleman."

"You are my lord," said she, starting up the road. "It is my happiness to obey."

With that, of course, he called her back, and in a tender speech pointed out to the gentry that none of them had a wife so perfect, and then he invited her to resume the raiment she had just got out of, and they all rode home to the castle, much gratified. From that hour she has been called Patient. Which beyond doubt she was.

The best of it was, the virtue never left her, not even now when her position was secure. Another kind of woman might have tried to get even with him for his temporary lack of faith, but she paid him if possible a sweeter deference than before.

That evening, for example, when dinner was prepared, she came to where he was talking in the hall with his men, she waited till he was quite at the end of what he was saying, till his glance gave her leave to interrupt, and then only she asked,

"Will your lordship please to eat?"

He had never found fault with her previous formula, a simple announcement that the meal was served, but the new refinement crowned a happy day, and benevolence welled up in him as he walked toward the roast beef.

From that day forth she perfected the art of consulting a husband's wishes. Not that she always questioned him. She was at times most considerate when she said nothing. One emphatic illustration will suffice.

The Marquis had long striven, like his father before him, to stamp out all robbery in the neighborhood, whether of the highway or the household, or at least to regulate the industry; the thief was hanged whenever possible, or persuaded to surrender the best of the plunder. The first step

toward the cure of vice, the Marquis believed, was to make it unprofitable, and he practiced his theory with such vigor that whereas rascals within his influence barely made a living, honest folk like himself had always something extra coming in.

Hardly a month from the reinstatement of Griselda, he was riding alone, of an afternoon, in the general direction of the Bishop's palace, not because his thoughts were on religion, but it was a soft road and good for his horse's feet. There without warning he was all but run down by a wild fellow in a gallop, holding on to a sack slung over his shoulder. His hair was shaggy and his eyes wicked, but the Marquis had looked into worse, and now he pulled his charger athwart the path, to make conversation inevitable.

"What's in the sack?" said he.

"Ah!" said the fellow, growling like a dog in the bear-pit, "still after the gold, eh?"

"I'll thank you to open the sack," said the Marquis. "From your irregular manner, I fear you've been at your old trade. Didn't I tell you

you'd hang the next time, for an example to the district?"

"And didn't I say I'd fight you for it? Get out of my way or I'll crack your skull!"

He spurred his horse, but the beast was winded and got up little headway, and the thief could do no damage with his hands unless he let go of his prize.

"Softly, my dear fellow! Before coming to blows, let us discuss the situation in the large. It is decided that you shall hang, the next time I happen to ride abroad with sufficient company to persuade the rope around your neck. The date, however, is not yet fixed, and it might be postponed if I found evidence of contrition."

The robber had his head on one side, listening to a faint noise far behind him. The Marquis leaned his own head parallel, and heard what might very well be the thump of horses on a hard run.

"There's the evidence!" shouted the thief, and flung the sack in his face.

By the time the Marquis had picked himself out

of the road, and had climbed up again with the heavy bundle over his shoulder, the man was half a mile on the way to safety, and the thump of the pursuers sounded close at hand. The Marquis plunged his horse into the bushes, and followed a modest bridle path through the woods to his castle gate.

He would have preferred to deposit the unwieldy burden in his private room before resuming his duties in general society, but on the terrace Griselda was leaning over the parapet, talking gracefully with the gentleman who had held her clothes for her on the day of her triumph.

"Ah," she said, "it's a sweet day for riding. Did you enjoy yourself, my lord?"

"Enjoy isn't the word," said he, conscious of what he was carrying, and making unsteadily for the tower door. What with the weight, he staggered every step or two.

"I noticed," she said, "you were trying out your new boots today, and you'll find your slippers handy in the middle of the floor. I thought you'd be lame by the time you got back."

She looked at his feet as though nothing else about him was conspicuous, then she turned to the gentleman by her side, and the pleasant words she spent on him caused his eyesight to yearn across the forest toward the horizon, and the Marquis, unobserved, hoisted the bundle up-stairs.

He got his boots off himself, being reluctant at that moment to call for aid. Then he stuck his feet into the slippers, took the dagger from his belt, cut the string from the neck of the sack, and sorted out the plunder around the room so you'd think he was setting up a bazaar.

There were three golden cups with the Bishop's seal on them, and whether they came off the altar or off the Bishop's table the Marquis couldn't be sure at sight, never having approached either high place, but he knew he had done the burglar a good turn to separate him from this incrimination. And there was a fine silver platter, large enough for a boar's head or a pig. The Marquis knew the church had nothing necessarily to do with that, since you wouldn't find a platter in a sacristy, and the Bishop didn't like to eat off silver. And here

was a gold chain for a lady's neck with a green stone hanging from the end of it, and two buckles to match—they weren't large enough for slippers, and where else could they be worn? He would ask Griselda. Whatever they were, like the necklace they must have belonged to a lady. Further evidence, he hoped, that the thief had been exploring other houses than the Bishop's. And here were two candlesticks—that's what had made the bundle heavy. Solid gold, if he was any judge, and the Bishop's seal on them. He stood them up side by side and backed off to admire the effect.

Griselda slipped in through the door, with her most unobtrusive gentleness, and cast an amiable eye upon the exhibition. He turned upon her, ready to indicate woman's proper place in the home. The way she looked at him, however, he could tell there was nothing but innocence, patience, and discretion in her unique heart.

"Do your feet feel easier now?" she said. "I wonder you men don't have your boots made of

softer leather. Foolish though we women are, we know enough not to dress in sheet iron."

Not a reference to the plunder on the floor! He paused a moment to thank God for his happy marriage.

"I came in," she said, "just to ask whether you're dining at home this evening, and if there's anything special you'd like to eat."

"Don't I always dine at home?"

"So far, thank God! But I ask in case some day you should have a different program."

"When I have, I'll let you know," said he, unreasonably testy. "And when some one invents a better dish than young pork, I'll let you know that too."

She bowed slightly, and smiled with a radiance most wives reserve for special occasions. Having done her errand, she was about to leave him. He was sorry his words had been rough.

"By the way," he said, "you're a wonderful woman; I doubt if a more obedient wife has yet been trained, and if I occasionally fall into sharp-

ness, it's only because you overdo your patience. As an act of friendship, let me point out that you bear down on the excess of the virtue. You ask me if I intend to dine at home. Where else should a man dine, unless he's absent from home entirely? Later on in the evening you'll wish to know whether I intend to go to bed. What else is a bed for? It's a beautiful excellence in you to consult my wishes, but pay a little respect also to my brains—don't ask if I like to breathe."

With every sentence of his lecture he felt more at ease with the stolen things grouped around his feet, and Griselda never took her gaze off his.

"Thank you, my lord," said she, "for this helpful hint. I understand that from now on your wishes are to be consulted as usual, but I am not to ask questions."

"Well," said the Marquis, "ask only when it's important. In matters of routine use your sense."

She gave him a parting glance of warm affection.

"Thank you again, my lord, and may I go

now—no, I withdraw that question—it's of little importance whether I go or stay."

Not wishing to be drawn into subtleties, the Marquis made no reply, and she was half-way down the staircase when he called her up again.

"Have a look at these buckles," said he, holding out a pair on his right hand, "and show me what they're used for."

She gave one brief glance, and began lifting up her skirts, well above the instep, well above the calf, much too far above the knee.

"For God's sake, woman," he said, "why this exposure?"

She was pointing to two ribbons around the left leg and around the right.

"I believe, my lord, they are worn, one on each, in place of the ordinary pin."

Now that his attention was directed to it, they really were fastened with pins, but the one on Griselda's left leg was not as she had described it, of the ordinary variety; it was a massive brooch such as gentlemen like himself stuck in their coat

near the heart when they appeared before fine company.

"Where did you get that?" said he.

"It's a loan from a friend," said Griselda. "The ordinary pin gave way, and he fixed it for me."

"Will you repeat that?" said the Marquis.

Griselda said it over again more explicitly.

"Without his aid the stocking would not have stayed up. He lent me this pin. He is at the present moment fixing or mending the other."

"Be more careful in your use of language," said the Marquis, "and perhaps it would be as well if you put these buckles to a practical use. And if you need further aid of this sort, please call on me. I'll return the brooch to your friend. Who is he?"

Griselda tried to remember.

"Several of them offered," she said, "and I forget whose brooch I accepted. I'll tell you as soon as I recall, or you can keep it till he asks for it."

At a modest computation the brooch appeared twice as valuable as the pair of buckles. The Marquis laid it on the floor, alongside the other plunder.

"I'll keep it till he comes for it," said he. "Let dinner be on time. I am hungry, and delay might make me irritable."

"It shall be precisely on the hour, my lord. And since most of the gentlemen are dining with us, shall I ask them at table which one fixed my garter?"

"You will not! In fact, you and I will dine alone."

She showed her pleasure.

"You are gracious, my lord."

When he came that evening to the corner of his room where she had set a table for two, he was struck by the decorations she had arranged—the festival note. There were flowers in a broad bowl, and on each side of the table with space enough between for him and her to look at each other stood the Bishop's golden candlesticks, with the best tall wax lighted on top of them. He was about to protest when he noticed that on each the Bishop's seal was adroitly hidden by silken wrappings. Uncertain though he usually was in the realm of drygoods, he recognized ribbon off the same bolt

as furnished Griselda with stocking support. Her mild blue eyes gazed into his.

"I found these candlesticks," said she, "in the attic."

He wondered how she had discovered the hiding-place so quickly.

"And I thought they would be charming just for us two, whenever we dine alone."

"That's all very well," he said, "and I'm strong on sentiment myself within proper limits, but it's old wisdom in housekeeping that when once the standard of living goes up, you can't bring it down again. If we get in the habit of eating by golden candle-light, no telling where we'll end."

"If you prefer," she said, "I'll take them back to the attic."

Two of the serfs were standing with the roast pig ready, one behind each chair, and Griselda began unwrapping the ribbon from around the Bishop's shield.

"You might as well leave them now," said the

Marquis, "and we'll include golden candlesticks among those important things about which you'll need my advice. The next time it occurs to you to put them on the table, ask me first."

She sat right down at her chair, obeying instantly like a good soldier. He leaned across the table and stuck in the ribbon where she had left it ready to untwine itself.

She didn't mention the candlesticks again, nor did he, until the servants had left the room.

"I'll put these away now," she said. "I suppose you'd like them in the same place?"

He looked at her with more suspicion than a husband should display to his wife.

"I'll carry them up myself," he said. "They're some heirlooms I stumbled on today, and they'd better be kept where the household won't see them. It's a dishonest world, and solid gold melts too easily."

She listened as though he were telling a pleasant story, a romantic plot leading to a happy ending.

"You managed well," she said, "and I'm always amazed at your resources. To think of finding heirlooms in the attic!"

It struck him that the compliment held a hint of danger. Since he had another trouble on his mind anyway, he changed the theme.

"About those buckles," he said, "I have neglected to point this out to you before, and if you've committed an indiscretion, I am willing to share the blame up to the present moment. From now on, however, you'd better be careful."

"Careful, my lord?"

"It's your great distinction, as a wife, to be considerate and obedient. I might even say pliable. But be careful that virtue doesn't spill over in the direction of other men. They should be treated as husbands usually are."

Griselda's blue eyes were round with docile enquiry.

"My lord, I am stupid—you'll have to say it clearer."

"Then I'll begin with a compliment and lead

from that to something important. You are what we men consider a fascinating woman, but it is your duty to fascinate nobody but me. You need not be disagreeable, of course, but you'll have to answer for it if others besides your husband fall in love with you."

"Of course, my lord," said Griselda. "Even to me that seems elementary. . . . . Were you about to speak of the buckles?"

"They illustrate what I had in mind. When the pin broke, you should not have turned to the general public for aid."

"It was an emergency," said Griselda, "but the next time it happens I shall know how to act. . . . Just how should I?"

"Good heavens, woman, don't you know how to keep your clothes on without advice from me?"

"In case there's difficulty in the future, my lord, may I come and ask?"

He wished she had more brains, but the thought occurred to him that a too active intelligence was perhaps incompatible with the peculiar charm of

her character. He took the candlesticks to the attic himself and hid them, along with the other treasures, in a more remote strongbox. He would have carried the key on his person if the instrument had not been so heavy and so large. The best he could do was to hide it in another strongbox, the key of which he hid in a third, the key of which he suspended by a string down an unused well.

A morning or two later, he received a visit from the captain of the Bishop's private guard, a tall man whose theology was sound but his manners imperfect.

"The thief who broke into the palace," he said, "was recognized as one of your vassals. The Bishop sends his compliments and says he doesn't much care which one of you hangs."

The Marquis was receiving the man on the terrace where Griselda, that other day, had been discussing the landscape with the courtier.

"If your errand is personal," said the Marquis, "you might as well go up to my room where we shan't be disturbed."

The captain of the Bishop's guard cast an eye on the tower door, at the dark stairway to which it led.

"I have a feeling," said he, "that my health is better out here. You don't, by any chance, happen to have the stolen articles in the house?"

The Marquis was dignified but courteous.

"By chance," he said, "they are not here. By chance, also, I did not steal them. Further, by chance, I don't know who the thief was, nor what he stole, and you may tell His Grace that in my opinion you are a more efficient guard for the palace than I should ever be, and I'd rather not be doing your work for you."

The captain turned on his heel.

"I'll tell him," said he. "You'll probably have a reply."

"Before you go you might leave a description of the articles, in case we are searching a robber on our own account. The things were all taken from the Bishop's palace?"

He saw Griselda coming across the courtyard toward him, and regretted that he had asked the

question. The captain, with his back turned, had not yet observed her.

"They were all from the palace—two golden candlesticks, a gift from the diocese on the Bishop's sixtieth birthday, and several golden cups."

"Was there nothing else?"

"That's all the Bishop mentioned."

"Pardon, my lord," said Griselda. "I'm not interrupting, am I? It's an emergency. The other pin has given way."

She was so occupied with her trouble, that in the simplicity of her heart she began to lift her skirt on the right side. The captain moved around where he could see what she was doing.

"You may go to your room," said the Marquis.

"But I thought——" she began.

"Go to your room!"

Griselda walked carefully toward the door and disappeared up the staircase.

The Marquis turned to the captain.

"My men will show you to the gate. A pleasant ride home."

His feelings were so excited that he made several turns around the walls of the castle before he went upstairs to give his wife another lesson in behavior. He made sure that the sentries were all back on their posts, inquired into the condition of the storeroom, gave orders for additional supplies of food for the household, and of boiling lead for possible visitors. Only when these domestic needs had been provided for did he mount deliberately to Griselda's modest room. She was waiting for him, sitting in the one chair the apartment afforded, gazing patiently out the window. The Marquis threw down his hat and his sword on the bed and began pulling off his gloves.

"We'll have a plain talk," said he. "I suppose it's the vulgar upbringing you had at home, but you lack reticence. Please understand that henceforth you will not discuss the state of your clothing before anyone but me."

"My lord," said she, "it was my hope to discuss it with you."

"But not when others are standing by. It's

immodest, and if I hadn't ordered you into the house before it was too late, you would have exhibited your entire right leg to that brigand. A lady should have greater respect for her person."

Griselda's eyes were never more hungry for information. "My lord, it's wonderful how I learn something every time I talk with you! Do I understand that it's wrong for a lady to be seen, in whole or in part, without clothes?"

"That's it, at last! Now hold on to that principle."

"The day you sent me back to my father's house," said Griselda, "if I remember correctly, it was at your request that I changed my wardrobe in the middle of the highway and before a number of your friends. I may have drawn the wrong conclusions from the incident."

"That," said the Marquis, "was an exceptional episode, allegorical in its application, and you'll notice that it was at my request. When I ask you to talk about your costume, or to dispense with it, it will, of course, be your duty to obey."

"I'm glad to have that explained, my lord—from now on you will have no occasion to worry. Was that all you found fault with?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"I have a question, if you can spare me a moment. When I looked for you in the courtyard, I hoped to get your advice, after we had arranged about the pin."

"Well, what is it?" He picked up his sword and his hat, as a hint to be brief.

"One of the gentlemen of your household, one of your best friends, asked me this morning to do him a favor, and I told him I couldn't unless you gave your permission."

The Marquis was in less hurry to depart.

"Who's the man and what's the favor?"

"My lord, I have a poor memory for names, but he's the gentleman who lent me the brooch."

"Oh, he is, is he? Can you describe him a little more accurately?"

He laid the hat and sword down again, and stood in front of her to watch her face.

"My lord, it's the same one who offered to fix the other pin this morning, but I thought you'd rather do it yourself."

The Marquis was as red as a lobster.

"Just tell me enough to recognize him by, and I'll slice his throat."

Griselda thought hard for marks of identification.

"Oh, I remember, my lord—it's the one who held my clothes for me during the allegorical episode."

The Marquis seized his sword, and without bothering with the hat, was dashing for the staircase.

"My lord, please don't go until you've answered my question!"

He glared back at her.

"Question?"

"When I was showing him how the pin was broken, and explaining that this time I couldn't accept another loan, he told me you were riding out this afternoon."

"What's that about a loan?"

"My lord, he has another brooch."

"Ah—and I'm riding out, am I?"

"So he said, and he wondered if I would—well, if I would sleep with him."

The Marquis sprang at her with his sword.

"You dare to tell me that!"

His vehemence surprised her.

"My lord, I understand I am to ask you only important questions, but this really seemed important."

The Marquis hesitated. "What did you say to the villain?"

"I told him I would do whatever you wished, and I would ask you at once."

"You mean, you actually mean, you would give your love to a man who is not your husband?"

She never looked more docile.

"Willingly, my lord, if you told me to."

"But even if I did go crazy, and even if you were so absurd as to sacrifice yourself——"

"Should you command me, it would never be a

sacrifice to obey. Besides, he's a very nice man."

The Marquis studied her open face, but could make nothing out of it.

"In what part of the castle," said he, "is your lover waiting for my answer?"

"My lord, when I said I must ask you first, he called for his horse. I doubt if he's now here."

The Marquis pulled his hat down tight over his head and grasped his rapier.

"Don't you stir from this house, Griselda, till I bring him back."

She was still waiting patiently in her room that afternoon when the Bishop called. He was attended by a rather strong squadron, including among other picturesque figures the captain of the guard. The sentry held them all up at the outer gate, explaining the impossibility of being hospitable during the absence of the Marquis. When the Bishop learned that Griselda was at home, he offered to leave his men outside and enter alone for a quiet talk with her on spiritual matters. The sentries, having no authority to keep out the church,

let him in. She received him in the Marquis's room, where there was more than one chair.

He was a handsome man, young for his years, and the prevailing expression of his face was brotherly love. At moments, however, his lips could tighten and his eyes flash. If ever he were angry, perhaps he would do something about it.

"My daughter," he said, "your husband's absence at this moment is unfortunate, and though I sympathize with reasonable precaution, I regret that my men camp inconveniently outside your walls."

"For me," said Griselda, "the situation is painful. I love to entertain visitors, but I always have to ask my husband first, and as you say, he isn't here. When he comes home and finds all those gentlemen detained outside the door, he will be sorry."

"Is he riding alone, my daughter?"

"He is, so far as I know."

"Then perhaps he *will* be sorry. . . . Meanwhile, my daughter, as your pastor I should like to

ask a question. When did your husband last ride out alone?"

"Oh, not for a long time—that is, several days ago."

"It wasn't last week, was it?"

"Yes, it was."

"Not Friday, perhaps?"

"Why, it *was* Friday!"

"Ah." The Bishop folded his hands across his belt. "Now, my daughter, when the Marquis returned from his ride last Friday, did he happen to bring with him a large sack or bundle?"

"I didn't ask him."

"And he, of course," said the Bishop, "would not be likely to tell you. . . . You didn't happen to notice around the house any articles of value to which you were not accustomed?"

Griselda smiled, as though her thoughts were suddenly pleasant.

"Indeed I did!"

"Oh, you did! And what did you notice?"

"Why, that evening he made me a handsome present—two presents."

"What were they?"

Griselda looked troubled. "Your grace, I'd be glad to tell you if I had my husband's permission, but he warned me, as a dutiful wife, not to mention them again without his consent."

The Bishop's lips stiffened, and the flash came into his eyes.

"Your husband's prudence is easily understood. . . . It is not my habit to arrive at truth through casuistry, but on occasion the method is justified—even if your husband forbade you to speak of the articles, you are free to show them to me."

Griselda shook her head.

"That, he expressly forbade."

The Bishop knit his brows for one impressive moment.

"My daughter, I have authority, as you know, to absolve you from your husband's commands—that is, where they conflict with higher duties. At this moment his soul is in more peril than yours, and I doubt if his wishes are from any point of view binding. Last Friday my house was robbed,

and only this afternoon, after I had sent the captain of my guard to confer with your husband, did we manage to catch the thief. In a moment of repentance, just before my men pulled the rope, the wretch swore that the treasure is now in your husband's possession. You understand, of course, the gravity of such a charge. To receive stolen goods is equivalent to stealing them, and to rob the church is a crime unpardonable."

"My husband," said Griselda, "would rob nobody. I don't think he would. At least, not a church."

"Daughter," said the Bishop, "I command you to tell the truth. What were those two articles he gave you?"

"Your Grace, they were two lovely buckles for my garters. If you wish to see them, I'll——"

"I'll take your word for it," said the Bishop. "Your husband must have broken into other homes besides mine."

"Or into none at all, Your Grace. I believe they are family heirlooms which he found in the attic."

"Perhaps," said the Bishop, "we might take a look at the attic where heirlooms are so casually mislaid and rediscovered."

Apparently he expected her to lead him to the spot, but she did not stir.

"Your Grace," she said, "is it the mission of the church to search our top floor?"

The Bishop was formulating a reply when the Marquis entered the room, quite at his ease.

"I am sorry I wasn't here to receive you, but from this minute we'll all make amends. Had I been home, Your Grace, your men would not have been kept waiting outside. I've just invited them to be comfortable in the courtyard. You'll dine with us, I hope; you and Griselda and I can have a quiet talk up here."

The Bishop was not sure how to proceed; the boldness of the Marquis's manner surprised him. Griselda spoke up.

"My lord, it wasn't dinner the Bishop came for—he wanted to know whether you had robbed his house."

The Bishop was embarrassed.

"Marquis, my house has been robbed, and that red-headed thief who lives, or did live, on your property, swore that you helped yourself to the stolen goods."

"And the amusing part of it," said Griselda, "is that the Bishop thought you found my garter buckles in his church. He wanted me to show them to him."

The Marquis laid his hand on his sword.

"And did you, my dear?"

The embarrassment of the Bishop became excessive.

"Your admirable wife convinced me of your innocence. That is, her logic convinced me—I dispensed with other demonstration."

He looked at the Marquis, and the Marquis looked back at him, and though their eyes were anything but friendly, they both began to smile at the same time.

"Griselda," said her husband, "we shall be ready for dinner whenever you care to serve it."

She went out to give the cook orders, and he turned his eyes back to the Bishop.

"I understand you hanged one of my men."

"I hanged a thief."

"And with no proof of his guilt!"

The Bishop smiled.

"None that I can produce, but he was seen riding away with the sack over his shoulder."

"That's not evidence. There's more than one red-headed rascal in the world."

The Bishop shrugged his shoulders. "I should say there's one fewer. See here, Marquis, I value those candlesticks. Where are they?"

The Marquis was on his dignity.

"I strongly suspect they are in your palace now, if they ever were there at all."

"In case you should come to your senses and should care to make restitution, I might absolve you from at least a part of the moral responsibility."

"In case I ever think of robbing a church, I'll remember your offer!"

At that, two serfs brought in the food and the wine, and set the table with the best castle pewter. The beef looked particularly juicy, and the onions sent out savors of a rare strength. The Bishop showed readiness to be getting at it.

"Shall we wait for your wife?" said he.

"I don't usually. She'll be here sooner or later. Draw up your chair."

In the midst of the busy silence Griselda came parading through the door, carrying two lighted candles set in the golden candlesticks, and this time there was no garter ribbon to hide the Bishop's shield.

"My lord," she said, "is it your wish to have these on the table tonight? For myself I can't imagine an occasion more intimate or more distinguished."

The Bishop looked around to see what she was bringing in.

His kindest judgment was that the Marquis should be hanged at once from the ceiling of his own room, but Griselda pleaded for her husband.

Griselda came parading through the door, carrying two lighted candles

"Your Grace, isn't this one of those mixed sins that can be squared off with a public penance?"

As she spoke, her hand played nervously with a golden necklace, at the end of which hung a green jewel. The Bishop followed the motion of her hand until his eye rested on the chain and the pendant.

So the Marquis picked his way barefoot through the streets, in nothing but his shirt, and in each hand he carried a lighted candle, but no candlestick. By his side, like the dutiful wife she was, walked Griselda in her handsomest gown.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

In our childhood they told us only the first part of the fairy tale. A beautiful thing, as far as it went. But now, to a mature taste, it seems fantastic, unless we hear it all.

There was a man, you remember, a simple person of extreme integrity, who on his way home from work every day passed the wall and the gate of a wooded park. It wasn't the shortest path to his cottage, but he had a thirst for beauty and magnificence, and merely to walk by on the outside would put him in good humor for the rest of the evening. His was the sort of mind which would furnish delightfully any region he couldn't see into. Not a living being had he ever laid eyes on, going or coming from the gate, but the wall he was sure circled a fine castle, and the windows of the castle, he could have sworn, glittered in the sun by day, or were golden with candles by night, and

up and down the stairs went tall, straight gentlemen and fearless ladies wearing rich and insufficient gowns, as only those women can who are beautiful and well-born. He described it to his daughter, from time to time, but she loved him with a profound understanding, and didn't believe a word he said.

One evening he paused at the gate and looked in. That is to say, he was over-weary and his spirits flagged, or his dreams would have been enough, but now the poor fellow felt like having a fact or two to rest on. Inside the handsome grill a smooth carriage road wavered away among the trees, and under the trees there was grass so dark it might have been black and so level it might have been water. The castle and the rest of it were hidden somewhere at the end of the road.

Well, that was as it should be, of course. He was just thanking God and thinking of moving when he noticed, not ten feet inside, on each flank of the road, a rose bush. The one on the right was barren, but from the very top of the one on the left

grew a sturdy bud, as scarlet as your heart. In the interest of symmetry and because his daughter would have to yield to the evidence, he wished he might take the rose home with him. Nothing was further from his intention than theft. Wouldn't you yourself be sorry for the owner of a fine place whose gardeners did their trimming carelessly? But of course the gate would be locked. No—as a matter of fact, when he leaned on it, it gave.

Half a minute later he was coming out with the rose in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the petals. He didn't observe the gate closing in front of him, as though he were pushing it. When it clanged, a fear ran through him, and he jumped around to see if the castle folk were looking. There, right upon him, was a nasty beast, taking up the whole road, and getting its claws ready.

"It's you, is it?" said the beast.

"It is," said the man. "If you'll kindly open this gate, I'll be on my way."

"First you'll put back the rose on the bush, and all the others you've been stripping off it."

Now the man began to be nervous, seeing he had to do with a creature unreasonable.

"I don't know how to put a rose on a bush——"

The beast let out an ugly laugh. "Neither do I!"

"And this is the only one I've taken."

"That's your bad luck," said the beast. "I thought you had got more out of it. It's foolish to die for only one."

With that he moved on a step, and the man saw that his last hour had come unless he could think of something eloquent.

"It's clear to me now," he said, "that I'm on the wrong side of the gate, and it's poor manners to quarrel with a gentleman on his own property, but if we both were to step out now into the middle of the open road, I could put up a good argument in self-defense."

The beast came nearer. Its jaws looked, at close range, horribly capable.

"If anything should happen to me," said the man, "in this secluded place, my daughter won't know why I'm late for dinner."

The beast rested in its tracks, much less ferocious.

"Then you have a daughter? Why didn't you tell me?"

"We got to it in the natural course of conversation," said the man. "Yes, I have a very charming daughter, quite young. She has no one in the world to look after her. I hate to think what might happen."

"Are you sure there's only one?" said the beast. "So often there are three, with a tendency to be jealous of the youngest. It upsets the home."

"There is but one, and there's no jealousy."

"In that case," said the beast, "she's probably less beautiful than you say. I've been wasting time." He flourished his claws and came on once more.

"Before I die," said the man, "will you humor a natural curiosity? My daughter is extremely lovely. Would you mind telling me what difference that makes to you?"

"Well," said the beast, a little annoyed at being

interrupted again, "if she were very lovely—which I have reason to doubt—I might possibly permit her to pay the penalty instead of you."

"Then the sooner you kill me, the better. I'm too fond of her for such a bargain."

"Perhaps," said the beast, "I failed to make myself clear. You, of course, I should kill, without the slightest regret. But if your daughter took your place, and if she is as delicious as you represent, I should marry her instead."

The man gave one look at the ugly brute.

"Kill me," he said. "The distinction is only in words."

But the beast was evidently smitten with the idea.

"Is there a sound reason for thinking your daughter would agree with you? Women have their own ideas about what is fascinating in our sex. If we could meet, perhaps she'd entertain my proposal, even without the pressure which the situation naturally puts upon her. I dare say, she'd go so far as to marry me, rather than see you torn to small portions."

"No doubt she would," said the man, "but I shan't force the choice on her."

Plainly the beast was embarrassed.

"Suppose we leave it this way. Take the rose home to your daughter, with my compliments, and ask her to step over here with you tomorrow at this hour. If she'll have me, I'll marry her. If not, you and I can go on from where we left off."

The man wasn't blind to the extra day the plan offered him.

"I'll do that," he said. "She won't have you, but I can use the interval to set my affairs in order."

He wondered the beast would set him free on his honor, as though a sane person would put his foot twice into the same danger. By the time he crossed his doorsill he was thinking well of himself.

"See what I've brought you, my dear." He held out the rose.

She was as brave a girl as one could hope for, in moderation. Her hair was blue-black and her eyes gray, but the lashes long and as black as her hair. Her skin was like milk, with a touch of pink

on the cheek-bone. She wasn't a small woman. She had fine honest hands and feet, and her bosom lifted her gown like a queen's.

"You're late for supper again," she said.

"The rose took me out of my way," said he. "If you knew the extraordinary circumstances in which——"

"If you'll eat the soup before it's colder," she said, and put the rose in a tumbler of water against the mantel.

"That flower now is a sample of which I've been telling you. It comes from the castle garden."

"And a good way from it, I dare say. Will you get on with your broth, Father, and let me wash the dishes and be off to bed?"

When she had fed him, he lighted his pipe.

"Tomorrow evening, daughter, you're to see the place with your own eyes. I've an invitation from what owns it. There's a fine park, as I've said, and such a castle as I never saw in my life, and if it happens to suit you, you can have it all."

She came over and put her hand on his brow.

"Does your head feel hot? Lay yourself on the bed quickly, and I'll fetch a cool rag."

"My head's as sound as your own," he said. "I'm telling the truth. Tomorrow we'll step over together, and if you like him, he'll marry you."

"A fine lord marry me?"

"The bargain's on the other side, my dear. *If* you like him. You probably won't."

She leaned backwards against the table. "If he's really what you say——"

"Ah, but I haven't said yet. My dear, he happens to be a nasty beast. He's got a hide on him would make a handy rug for the kitchen floor, and his claws would scratch the head off an elephant."

"Then I don't want him." She went on putting the dishes away.

"I feared you wouldn't." He pulled hard on his old pipe.

"What's got into you, Father, to tell me this?"

"I gave my word to the beast. He caught me picking the rose for you, and he was in the way to put me out of my troubles when we happened to

mention you, in the general talk. 'You can just bring her to me,' he says, 'and if she'll have me, I'll marry her, and you can slide out of it with your life.' "

"He's as rough as that?"

"All of that and more!"

She sighed. "That would be a fine husband now, if he were only a man!"

"And a large 'if,' " said her father.

She went on with her work, still thoughtful.

"Do I understand, unless I marry him, the beast will kill you?"

Her father took the pipe out of his mouth and blew a philosophic ring.

"That's *his* idea of it, but I've no intention of going back alone. If you don't want him, we'll both stay away."

"And what's to prevent his taking a mean revenge?"

"Nothing but our wits."

She swept the floor and drew a chair to the fireside.

"Since it must be, Father, we'll go to the castle tomorrow, and I'll see what he's like."

The man sat rather stiff, not at all happy.

"Daughter, I can tell you now, he's like nothing pleasant, and if you let him know what you're sure to think, there I'll be on the ground, handy for him!"

"Stay here then," said she, "and I'll go alone. I'm hopeful there may be something in it. If he wants me as much as you say, and it's a fine castle and an easy life, perhaps I can learn to keep my eyes off him."

That's how they came knocking at the gate the next afternoon, the girl cheerful and looking her best, the man weak in the knees but ashamed to stay home. They had rapped but once when the beast stood across the path, uglier than before.

"It's you again, is it?" said he. "And is this the girl?"

"This is," said the man.

The beast hung down his jaw and looked at her. She held up her head and looked at him.

"Well," said he, "am I your husband? Be quick about it!"

She didn't hesitate a minute. "Good evening, Father," she said. "A pleasant walk home to you, and leave the kettle on the back of the stove when you go to bed."

There she was, alone with the beast for a week or a month, and however he behaved, he didn't eat her, and except for his looks she had nothing to criticise. Her only trouble was what kind of mess her father would make of the house meanwhile, for being a lover of beauty, he wasn't neat.

"Would it inconvenience you at all if I stepped over this morning to see who does the dusting for him?"

The beast was doubtful. "Don't you love me, after all?"

"What a question! Of course I love you, but that won't keep the old house from looking a disgrace, and I came away in a hurry."

"The point is," said the beast, "if I let you go now, will you return?"

"At a quarter to six, and not a minute later."

The beast grew feeble and melancholy. "Then a quarter to six will be the decisive moment of my life," said he. "If you're on time, it will be because you love me."

"No," said she, "it will be because he's been cleaning up after himself."

The beast didn't appreciate that answer at all, and the last she saw of him as she went out, he had a bad droop to his spirits.

Well, she wasn't on time. It was two minutes past the hour when she hurried into the castle. She called him, but he couldn't answer. He was flat on his face, upstairs in the library, just about to die.

"It was worse than you'd believe," she began, excusing herself. Then she observed his state.

"Darling!" said she.

The beast gave a desperate groan.

"I had one chance to live," said he, "if I could find a woman to love me. Since you don't, I might as well die."

With that he started to draw his last breath. It came over her that she was used to him and would miss him sorely. As a husband he was better than most and the only one she was likely to have. A bad lump came into her throat.

"You've been good to me, and I wasn't late for anything but to make my father's house respectable. God knows I love you as I should!"

The beast stopped midway in his dying.

"If you had it to do again, would you marry me?"

"As often as you like, and for love."

With that he gave a cry, the ugly hide fell off him, and he got up from the floor, as handsome a young prince as you ever heard of.

"I don't need to explain," he said, "there was a spell on me."

She could see his manners were perfect. Whatever she would have said, he put his lips on hers, and they used kisses for words.

In our childhood that's as far as we got with the story. They lived happy ever after. But after

what? There's the whole point. Can a husband turn from a beast into a prince without a ripple? He can not!

For a while she enjoyed herself. It had all the improvements of a second marriage without losing a bit of the first. He continued to worship her day and night, when they were alone, and with the change in his appearance they could now go into society. On the wedding date she had her father in to remember the anniversary, and he strained himself to do her credit in a new suit of clothes, kept his eyes on how they use the knife and fork in the great world, made no serious mistake, and was a proud man. When he walked home, late at night, he took his way between the rose bushes at the gate, and whether they were in bloom, it was too dark to see.

Twelve months, or a little less, came on with the usual speed. He would take the shortest path now from his work to his cottage, since he knew what was behind the castle walls and had nothing to guess about. As he drew on his pipe of an evening,

he praised heaven that his child wanted what she had, and that his son-in-law looked as fine as he was.

Then they asked him in to remember the wedding day again, and he took out the new suit and went over. They were very polite, of course, but from the moment he stepped across the mat he observed a decline in their temper. The extent the prince nudged himself to say nice things to his wife was enough to make a father's heart sink, and though she never left off smiling at her husband, the wrong answers she gave made him wonder what she was thinking of. It was the longest dinner the poor man had ever eaten his way through. Trouble there was, beyond question, and he'd be a sorry kind of parent to leave the house before he'd got to the bottom of it. So when they asked him to stay the night, not thinking he would, he said yes, and they had to set the guest room to rights.

At breakfast the prince asked him how he slept, and his daughter had his toast burned just to the flavor he liked, but it took more than that to throw dust in his eyes.

"Would you care for some exercise in the garden?" said the prince.

"Later," said the man, "but for the present I'll gossip with my daughter while you're starting the day."

So the prince called for his horse and went off to see what his farmers would be doing when they thought his back was turned.

"Now, daughter," said the man, "you may tell me what's on your heart."

"Nothing but happiness," said she.

"Consider you've said your duty, and let's get to the truth."

She began to cry her eyes out. He took his pipe from his pocket, and waited till she could manage her tongue.

"I don't know whose fault it is," she said, "but he isn't what he was."

"Few of us are," said her father. "Where does it show?"

"It's hard to lay a finger on any fault," said she, "he behaves more like a gentleman every day—but he isn't interesting."

"Well, daughter, that's a difficult thing to ask of any of us, year in and year out. It's a rash man would promise it to any woman. To love, honor and cherish, that's in the contract, but not to be entertaining."

"I don't ask entertainment—I've more than I need—but at first he was interesting. That is, while he was a beast. Of course, I'm glad my love turned him out of the spell into his natural shape, glad for him, that is, but it's hard on me."

The man thought best to smoke a while in silence, as though he were considering a remedy.

"Would you mind making that a little clearer?" he said at last.

"I can put in into three words, Father. So long as he was a beast, I didn't really know what he was, and though he treated me gently, how could I be certain he wouldn't break loose any minute? I was just hanging on to life from hour to hour, and I tell you now, Father, I'll never again have such a thrill of a time. But as soon as he turned back into his proper form, I saw his manners would be

as regular as the tick of the clock, and I've nothing to look forward to."

With that, her feelings got away from her and she began to cry again.

"That's very sad, as you put it," said the man, "yet you seem to overlook your fortune in having a husband at all. If his manners are monotonous, the quality of them is otherwise beyond reproach."

She wiped her eyes and went at the argument again with a little more spirit.

"I took him because he was a beast," said she. "If I'd met him first as what he is, how do I know I'd have taken him at all? He's a good man, but there's nothing exceptional in that. If he's a prince—well, if I'd wanted a prince, I'd have looked over more than one. There may be better. Really, his only distinction is that he once was a beast. That's not enough to found enduring affection on. And I don't think a husband has the right to change so much. I vowed to be faithful to one sort of person, and now it's another."

"Daughter," said the man, "you may not know

it, but you're talking about matrimony. Yours isn't a special case."

"Isn't it!" said she. "I dare say that I know my own case as well as anybody. When you married my mother she wasn't under a spell, was she?"

"No," said the man. "I was."

She turned discouraged and sulky.

"Well, that's how it is. I shouldn't have told you if you hadn't inquired. I didn't expect you to understand."

Her father finished his smoking and put away his pipe. For several minutes he leaned forward in his chair, meditating.

"You're the sort of woman," he said, "who wants love to be a constant surprise."

"I am," said she.

"You'd just as soon marry a poor man as a prince, if he had that mysterious thing in him which keeps up the astonishment."

"I would."

"But if you must marry a prince, it would be your true destiny to have one who, because of his

unusual advantages, could bring a fresh flavor on every time he kissed you."

"That would be my proper destiny."

"Well, it's evident you've missed it, daughter, and I'm sorry for you. It's a sad thing when a fine girl with a taste for pleasure gets a dull husband, with nothing in him but virtue. I suppose it's too late to help it."

"Too late, is it?" said she. "I'll invent a way out, before I'm an old woman!"

He shook his head sympathetically, but if she had seen his eye she would have caught a twinkle in it. Something not grief was in the back of his head. He sat around the house all morning, and she didn't like to ask if he had no work to do at home. At lunch he had a second helping of every dish and left the table reluctantly.

"How about a walk in the garden now?" said the prince, "or is it your habit to take a nap?"

"The kind of life I lead," said the man, "that is, when I'm not visiting distinguished relatives, gives me no occasion even to remember the name of a nap. I'll walk in the garden."

"And will you join us?" The prince spoke to his wife so politely she couldn't think of going.

"I'll have a moment or two to myself," said she, not gracious at all.

The prince took his father-in-law to look at the best rose bushes—behind the castle, they were, not near the gate.

"You get that shape on the vines by pruning," he said. "It's an art."

"That was my own impression," said the man, who was thinking of something else. "I'm glad you and she are so happy."

The prince looked startled, if not guilty.

"She? Oh, you mean your daughter! Yes, we're furiously happy. Perhaps you'd care to see the latest bushes I've planted—a rare flower, with an unusual leaf."

"It often happens in marriage," said the man, "that though the people are fond of each other, they don't mix well. You know what I mean."

The prince nodded. "A very common tragedy," said he.

"I'm glad you've escaped it," said the man, "since it's my daughter you married."

The prince realized he would have to see this subject to a conclusion.

"Yes, I married your daughter, and it was my own idea, and I ought to accept the consequences without complaint. We're fond of each other, up to a certain point, but don't think we are harmonious. We aren't."

"That's the saddest news I've had for an age," said the man. "Here I've been persuading myself you two were living on the same heart-beats, and all that sort of thing."

"Ah," said the prince, "that's what I dreamed of!"

"Is there a comfortable spot to sit down and talk it over?" said the man. "I'd be sorry to think the misfortune is beyond repair."

"Talk will do it no good," said the prince, dusting off a garden bench with his handkerchief. "It's partly our temperaments, and partly it's in the situation."

The man settled himself back, and crossed his knees.

"The cases which have come under my observation," said he, "have always been blamed on the temperaments. What's the situation you refer to?"

"Why, she was the first woman whose attention I managed to attract," said the prince, "and then only indirectly through you. If you hadn't taken the rose, she and I would never have met."

"Well, what of that?" said the man.

"She was serviceable in putting an end to the spell," said the prince, "and I'm aware of my obligation to her on that score, but I doubt if the circumstance is sufficient to sustain a lasting passion. She saved me once, but that episode is finished, and now I have to live with her. It doesn't sound gallant, but I can't help it. If you yourself fell into the sea and a handy woman pulled you out, you'd feel at the time like giving her everything you had, but afterwards, when you made her acquaintance, you might ask why she should profit so much by your falling in."

"Come now," said the man, "you didn't marry her for a reward—you were for having her or me, and the rescue came later, when she loved you for yourself alone."

"The order of the incidents is immaterial," said the prince. "She did rescue me once, and somehow I confused that service with her personality. What I loved, I see now, wasn't herself but the rescue."

"In the wear and tear of life," said the man, "such a distinction is too subtle. You can't marry a bit of conduct—you have to take the whole woman along with it."

"Precisely," said the prince. "That is my grief."

The man changed his legs and crossed the other knee.

"Tell me this," said he. "If you were to do it over again, this time starting in your natural shape, with no rescue needed, do you think you would take her for a wife?"

"I have grave doubts of that."

"And why?"

"I can put it into three words," said the prince. "So long as I was a beast and an ugly monster to look at, there was a strong chance she might leave me, any minute. Each kind word she spoke I feared would be the last, and I couldn't blame her. If she took by accident a step or two away from me, I'd be watching if she'd try to run. That was the wild romantic life for a red-blooded man, keeping hold on a woman with so good a reason for being ticklish! But now that I'm dangerous no longer, she'll stay till the end of time. You couldn't put her out. There's no satisfaction in it."

"I see it all now," said the man. "You're the high-spirited sort yourself that must have mettle in your woman. You don't object to her being faithful, but she must not be reassuring."

"I couldn't have found better words for it."

"It's not my daughter's humble birth that annoys you—you'd like a simple girl as soon as a countess, if only she put you to some inconvenience watching what she'd be up to."

"There it is!" said the prince, with a sigh.

"I'm sorry for you," said the man, with the same twinkle as when he comforted his daughter. "You were made for better things. You should have married a girl who would flirt with the lamp-post and give you a heartache every time you had a friend in for dinner. It would have called out the best in you. You've missed your destiny."

"That's the sad part of it," said the prince.

"Well," said the man, "perhaps it's a blessing you can't do anything about it now."

"Can't I!" said the prince.

But his father-in-law didn't care whether he could or not, and the conversation shrunk back to garden-planting.

At supper there was a pleasant restraint on all three of them, till his daughter began to think of the housekeeping.

"You'll stay another night with us, of course," she said.

"I'll have to be walking home," said the man. "Many thanks just the same. It's done me good to

have a look at you both, and to see with my own eyes how well you're getting on."

When he referred to their happiness, she and the prince put on a little more gloom.

"If we told the truth about marriage," he continued, "the young folks wouldn't waste so much time expecting happiness while making each other's acquaintance. The pleasure of it comes later, when you know the worst."

"The worst!" said the prince, out of a full heart.

"My husband and I are so well acquainted already," said his wife, "our happiness should be almost too much to bear."

"It is," said the prince.

She looked murder at him.

"That's the sort of remark," she said, "no gentleman would make before the relatives."

"My dear," he said, holding himself in, "I was agreeing with a statement from your own lips."

All the while the man was sitting back, trying not to show his delight in the row.

"There are some statements," said his daughter, "no gentleman should agree with."

"There are," said the prince. "You're quite wrong to say we understand each other. You don't understand me at all."

"How you flatter yourself!" said she. "For even an average woman, now, you'd be no more complicated than a shallow dish of water."

"Complicated!" said he. "It's simplicity itself. I was born for better things."

"And what was I born for? Was it for nothing but to rescue my father from you? What affection can you ask of me now, remembering the awkward way we were introduced? And after that I was to pull you out of that spell you were under. Do you think two such deeds of mercy are enough to satisfy a young woman with a zest for living? Haven't I a destiny of my own? The way you men believe the world centers in yourselves!"

"As to that," said the prince, "I'm nothing if not reasonable. The world should center in me and my wife. But there can't be two centers, obviously. If we were the proper mates for each other, no doubt we'd agree without difficulty, you'd have the same tastes as I, and the one destiny would do for

both. Saving your father and rescuing me were, as you put it, minor incidents; almost any woman would have served. The question now is whether you're a fit wife for me, you having no leanings toward the romantic side of things."

"Haven't I, though!" said she. "Just because I have, I'm expostulating with you now in this restrained tone. I've made up my mind to leave you, sooner or later. There must be a man somewhere who has a spark in him, and I don't lack the courage to find him."

"What courage you have, I don't know and I care less," said the prince. "If I hadn't a control of myself, with your father listening to your disgraceful talk, I'd give you a piece of my mind that would raise the skin off your back. One misfortune after another have I suffered, and my patience is wearing thin."

"Misfortune, do you call it?" said she. "Lift your finger towards me, and you'll have the house to yourself for the rest of your days. You've enough to live down as it is. All this time I've

stayed with you, and never asked what naughty thing you did to turn yourself into a beast in the first place! I didn't intend to mention it so soon, but it's been on my mind. Who'll have you next, if I go?"

The prince drew a long breath, to relax his voice.

"Just put out of your head the idea of leaving me. You're my wife. It's permanent. I'd hate to lift my finger against a woman, but the common sort, such as you come from, sometimes learn from a thrashing. I'm master in my own house, and from now on you'll behave like a lady, especially when we have guests."

"This very minute I'll get my hat and coat," said she, starting for the door.

It was beautiful, the quick way he caught her by the neck and had his fist under her chin.

"At this point," said her father, "I'll take my leave, if it's all the same to you. Thank heaven, neither of you has a destiny which can't be satisfied at home."

They let go of each other and saw him to the door, with their best manners. As he stepped down the path, limber and smart, the prince asked his wife if she didn't think her father was a remarkable man for his years, and she thought he was.

Then the prince turned off the porch light and bolted the door.

"I'll retire now," said he. "I've had a full day."

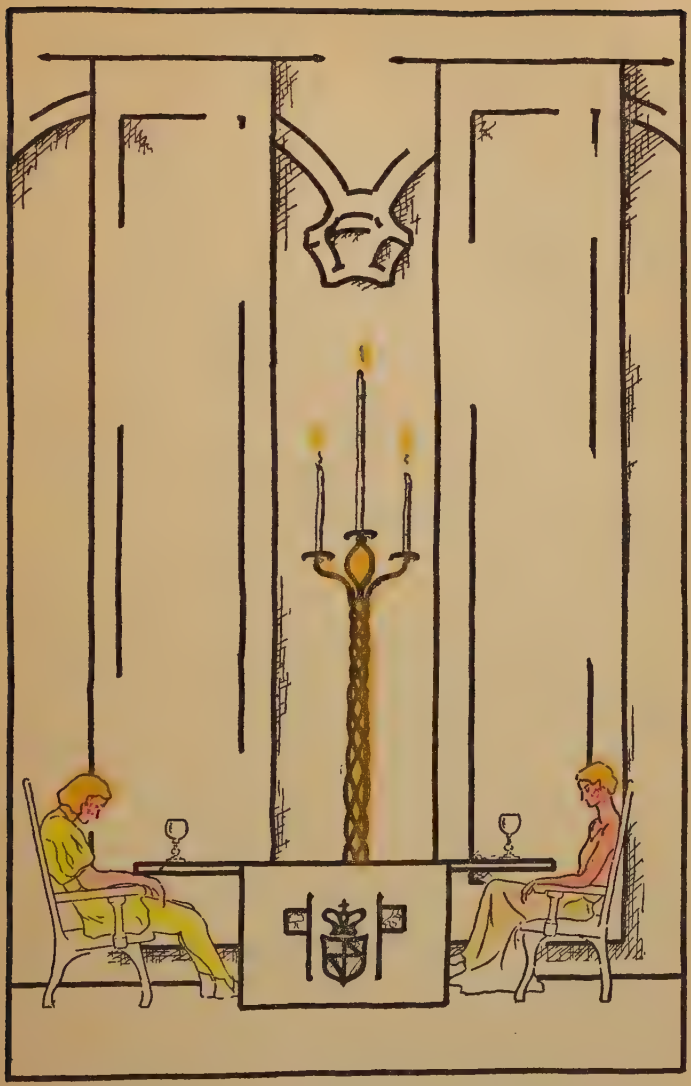
"I'm weary myself," she said, "and I don't see why, for I've accomplished nothing in particular."

"The dull days are the most tiring," said he. "But entertaining your father crowded me a little, with all I have to do on the place."

"I appreciate your kindness to him," said she. "I knew it was for my sake."

"Oh, don't mention it," said the prince. "He's quite a person in his own right."

"What I was thinking," she said, "was that an important man like you, with a fine destiny to live out, ought to be saving his energies for the essentials. I ought to take the little annoyances off your



The great folk always had time for the common incidents of living

hands, so you could carve out your career with a free sweep."

"Not at all," said he. "You can read in history, the great folk always had time for the common incidents of living—it's what keeps us in touch with the less fortunate. And I wouldn't make a drudge of you—the kind of wife I'd want would have a career of her own."

"You're career enough for me," said she. With that she kissed him goodnight, and he kissed her back, and one thing led to another, and there they were locked in each other's arms, partners in the perfection of bliss.

Meanwhile the man found his way back to the cottage. At the gate he walked out between the two rose bushes and never gave them a thought. He was busy with kind memories, running over his youth, and what he had learned then and picked up later about men and women, trying to straighten the tangle of it, as a man will who is slipping from the end of middle age into something more mysterious and more profound.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

SLEEPING BEAUTY

When she pricked her hand with the spindle, she dropped down in the middle of the floor in the tower where she had found the old woman spinning, and the King and the Queen came up the narrow staircase, frightened and out of breath. Though the disaster was clear enough and the warning had been ample, they sent for the good fairy, to see if anything could be done.

Very little comfort they got from her! The prophecy was running a normal course, she said, the young woman's condition was satisfactory in the circumstances, and at the end of the century they would know more about it.

Her one practical suggestion was that since the young woman would have to lie there so long, they'd better make her comfortable in bed. The Queen, between her tears, thought it might be wise to get her out of her clothes and under the blanket,

but the good fairy advised leaving her on top, fully clothed against an emergency.

She was just turned eighteen, and a lovelier girl couldn't be thought of. Not too tall—just the right size. She had the wide-set eyes and the generous mouth which are the signs of courage and a warm heart.

Whatever she had had her mind on last, must have been pleasant—in her face lingered the flush of a happy thought. The rapture she dreamed of had made her careless with the spindle. Her hair and her eyes were dark, all but black—the coloring of the ones who fall in love at sight and are persistent about it.

The three of them stood looking at her, sad and discouraged.

"When she wakes up," said the good fairy, "she'll find herself among strangers. She'll be lonely."

"Will she remember us?" said the Queen.

"She'll think it was only a moment ago she started the nap."

"That's not so bad," said the Queen.

"Ah, but she'll discover her mistake the moment she lays eyes on a human being. Strangers, I said. You'll be in your graves by that time."

The Queen tried to grasp the whole picture, but found her emotions confused. "My daughter, my poor daughter!" she sobbed. "It's little better than death! So far as we're concerned, it *is* death!"

The King bit hard on his beard.

"I was thinking," said the good fairy. "You might like to be put to sleep with her, for company when she wakes."

The King turned a sharp eye. "For the full hundred years?"

"Of course."

He reflected, and glanced at his wife for a hint, but she was waiting to see what he'd say first.

"Just the Queen and me?"

"If you prefer—but I meant the whole court."

"Well, that wouldn't be so bad. . . . And one is sure to wake?"

"As sure as one is of anything. I've never known a case of failure."

The Queen stood gazing down at her daughter, sorrowful but alert to the conversation. If he didn't decide wisely, he knew she would reprove him later.

"How about extending the spell to the kingdom?"

"It can't be done," said the fairy. "There's a limit."

"I feared there might be. And I suppose you couldn't extend it to my neighbors, either, with whom our relations are at the moment slightly strained."

The fairy shook her head. He shook his, sympathetically.

"I oughtn't to be selfish—I'm needed here."

Neither his wife nor the fairy said a word to show how necessary they thought he was. He resorted to argument.

"If it were death indeed, my mourning would not take the cowardly form of suicide. Since this condition, however protracted, is only sleep——"

The Queen wiped her eyes. "Whatever the con-

dition," she said, "we must provide for the child, and in my present state I've no control of my faculties. I dare say my husband and I can talk it over, when our nerves are settled, and let you know any time? It will be so long before she——"

"If you're all to wake up at approximately the same moment," said the fairy, "you must decide now. The spell is for precisely one hundred years. As it is, you'll be twenty-five minutes late."

The King cleared his throat and put on the manner of having made up his mind.

"Here's what you can do!" he said. "Put them all to sleep! Everyone in the castle except the Queen and me. It's understood that we're to have three minutes now, to step out before you begin. Tomorrow morning we'll meet you at the castle gate, and I'll know then whether we shall embark on this experiment, or whether duty will prevent."

He led the Queen downstairs and out the front gate, and hardly had they taken the salute of the last guard when the charm fell, and every living thing still within the walls turned to carven silence.

The news spread like spilled water. It was five o'clock, or a few minutes later, on the twenty-seventh of April, a Tuesday—a rather warm day for the time of year, every tree and bush putting out a fragile green. The King and Queen spent the night at the home of a wealthy lord in the suburbs, and the opinion of the countryside was that they had had a lucky escape, the ministrations of the good fairy being quite as undesirable as the mischief of the bad one, and certainly involving more of the population.

The King accepted his host's sympathy and his congratulations, but he avoided his wife's eye, and said nothing about what he had to choose between next morning. The Queen too kept her thoughts to herself, until they had retired and were preparing—the coincidence was embarrassing—for sleep.

"If we do nothing," she said, "people will misinterpret our motives."

"They will anyway," said the King. "That's what a motive is—something to misinterpret. No, the hour has passed. In an impulse of affection

we might have put ourselves away, but to walk around there in cool blood, right after breakfast, and ask to be hypnotized for a hundred years—well, nobody would understand it. I shouldn't understand it myself."

"It isn't as though we had lost her altogether; it's not like death," said the Queen, having had time to reconsider. "It's more like eternal youth. Every day we can stop in and look at her. And we can plan for her waking. Usually it's difficult to arrange the future for children because they won't stay quiet while you're doing it.

"And another thing—I was thinking at dinner, for people of our age it wouldn't be possible to step aside for a hundred years and be happy when we came back. We have formed too many intimate relations. But she, dear child—life hadn't begun to touch her. Her heart, at least, was sheltered. I saw to that myself."

He noticed a possible criticism of his own vigilance.

"Her heart was no more sheltered than the rest

of her! I forbade all spinning. How that old woman got into the tower, I can't——"

A knock at the door stopped him. He slipped on his host's dressing-gown, and the Queen withdrew into an alcove.

It was the lord of the house, looking frightened.

"I beg your Majesty's pardon for interrupting at this time of night, but the castle guard, those who were left on the outside, wish your Majesty's orders in a peculiar case."

The King stepped into the hall and pulled the door to behind him.

"A young man, the elder son of your game warden, is acting suspiciously. He expresses a wish to enter the castle and be put to sleep with the other attendants. At this moment he is clinging to the bars of the postern gate. The guards would of course pull him off, if they weren't afraid to go so near."

The King considered.

"If he wants to cling to the gate, let him cling, so long as he doesn't break in."

"He can't do that, your Majesty; the gates won't open."

Around the King's ankles the hall was draughty. "I'll give it my attention in the morning," he said. "If he can't get in, it probably doesn't matter."

The lord of the house bowed, and the King slipped back and got into bed. The Queen stuck her head out of the alcove.

"Is he gone?"

"He is! That's what would happen if I weren't here to answer their silly questions! Not one of them thinks for himself!"

"Did you bolt the door?" said the Queen.

"I don't know; I suppose so; you'd better take a look."

She took a look, and bolted it. He waited for her to get in beside him before he blew out the candle. In the darkness they meditated, until the state bed ceased to feel clammy. The Queen turned her head toward him.

"I was about to say, when we were interrupted,

it's a blessing she had not given her affection to anything you might call contemporary. After a hundred years, she'll still belong to the time she's living in."

"Very true." The King's voice had a hollow, upward sweep in it, from suppressing a yawn. "But as a matter of fact, my dear, I hardly expect it to last a hundred years."

"You don't?"

"Of course not! This sort of thing always starts off with a commotion, but it rarely lasts. It stands to reason it can't. Too many factors are involved."

"How wise you are!" said the Queen. "I never should have thought of it! When do you believe she'll wake up?"

"Almost any day—after a week or so. It will give her a good rest, and that ill-tempered hag will have made her point. That's all she wants."

Approaching slumber made the Queen reminiscent. "I never could understand why she took it so to heart. We didn't mean to offend her; it was an accident."

"As I recall," said the King, "you failed to invite her to the christening."

She noticed how he was shifting the blame. "You sent out the invitations yourself!"

"Did I? It's not my habit."

"Not now, but it was when you were young and active."

He would have defended himself if he hadn't been busy with another yawn. She regretted lashing out so smartly at him in the midst of their bereavement.

"It was the wicked fairy's fault, not yours," she said. "The creature hadn't been around for years, and how could she expect to be thought of?"

They lay in peace for a moment. It was the King's habit, just before losing consciousness, to indulge in philosophic generalization.

"It's odd, when you consider it," said he, "that life, instead of being continuous, as the shallower sort suppose, is really inter"—he yawned out loud this time—"intermittent."

When he paused, the Queen roused herself with a start.

"Eh? Oh, to be sure!"

The King adjusted himself to his favorite position, with his good ear on the pillow. He didn't care whether she listened.

"The wicked fairy wasn't around at the time—hadn't been for years—intermittent fairy; likewise the good fairy when we needed her—off duty—now the Princess, for a while—asleep—waking—waking, asleep . . . ."

The first thing in the morning, he and the Queen started back to the castle. His decision was made—he would refuse to be enchanted. If the fairy asked him in public, he would give his official engagements as reason to stay alive, or if she spoke to him privately, he would explain that by no other course could he keep the kingdom in the family. There were further arguments, but these would be enough.

When they reached the castle gates, a small crowd was gathered, watching the game-keeper's eldest son still clinging to the grill. They made

way for the King, who walked as near as he thought prudent. The vigil had clearly weakened the young man—or you might call him a boy. He turned on his Majesty a haggard face and a pair of eyes not far from crazy.

"Come away from there!" said the King. But the boy stayed where he was. "Just step over here where I can talk to you," said the King. "You seem to be in a bad way about something, and if we could get at it in a friendly spirit, I might help you."

"Promise to do what I wish," said the boy, "and I'll talk with you."

The crowd gasped at his impudence, but the King raised a hand of charitable warning.

"You'll have to talk with me first, my lad, before I can know what's the matter with you."

There was such kindness in his tone, and the boy was so tired, he let go the bars of the gate and staggered toward the King.

"Now you've got him! Don't let him slip back!"

A stout guard was on each side of him, holding

an arm. There was a gust of applause in the crowd for the King's masterful strategy.

"Now, young man," said he, "what was it you thought you wanted?"

The boy sulked. "It's of no account now. It's too late."

"Too late for what?"

But the boy wouldn't tell.

"What were you doing at the gate?"

"If you please, your Majesty," said the guard, "he told us two different stories—that is, last evening. First he was keeping an appointment with a friend, and afterwards he wanted to see what it would be like to sleep for a hundred years."

The King studied him.

"You really want to—for a hundred years?"

"That's what I want now," said the boy.

"I might speak to the fairy about your case," said the King. "If you've set your heart on it, I can think of no objection. Where *is* the fairy, by the way?"

She wasn't there—that's all anyone could tell him. He never saw her again, and therefore he

After the hundred years

had no occasion for his arguments against joining the Princess in her long sleep.

He and the Queen adjusted themselves to another castle, while year by year the weeds and the thorns grew into a hedge around their old home, and the lost child became a poetic memory. Which is as much as to say that those who escape enchantment can get used to anything. In time the game-keeper's son recovered his wits, and a pretty girl married him.

But at the end of the hundred years the kingdom had passed to another family, after all, and at the right moment the Prince of this strange house came knocking at the old castle gate, at the very bars where the game-keeper's son had clung. Because the time was up, or because the lock had rusted off, forty years before, the grill gave way when the Prince pushed on it. He was at an age to make straight for the ladies' bower, and the first thing he found worth looking at was the Princess where her mother had left her, a century before, advantageously displayed on the outside of the bed.

The flush of happiness was still on her cheeks, left by her last thoughts, or by the pleasant dreams with which she had whiled away the time. It was what you might expect in an enchanted castle, and the Prince, being a well-read person, knew it was his part to wake the maiden with a kiss.

He would have done it even if his reading had been meager, for he was by nature a poet, and she was too lovely to neglect. He leaned over, with all the worship of a young and sound heart welling up in him. Just at that moment she turned on her side and threw a limp arm on the other pillow.

"Rudolph!" she whispered.

The Prince stood up, chilled to the bone. Her affections were already bespoken! He had heard of ladies who in their sleep murmured the name of a secret lover, to the embarrassment of their husbands. He wished no wife of that kind. And this lovely creature, for all he knew, had been murmuring for a hundred years. She was evidently far gone.

Disappointment of this kind is hard for youth to

bear, and the Prince, being by temperament a dreamer, felt the full agony of the wound. But he was proud,—as a Prince should be; no one should ever know this dash to his hopes.

He stepped softly down the stairs again through the sepulchral halls, out through the old rusty gate. His knees trembled under him, and melancholy made him white. At the table that evening his mother asked him if he were ill.

"Not in body," said he.

She was accustomed to his literary turn of phrase, and warned him once more not to overtax his mind.

But the Princess, after he had left her, woke up by easy and natural stages. It was a hundred years to the minute. The first thing she did was to walk over to her writing desk and look at the date on the calendar. Sure enough, it was Tuesday, and a fine sunny morning. She was still too dazed with her long sleep to tell morning from afternoon.

She stretched herself on the bed again and gave

herself to agreeable thoughts, humming a little song by way of accompaniment. Then she rose again, walked to the bell rope, and rang for the maid. She could hear the far-off tinkle down the corridor, but nobody answered. She rang again, louder, with no better results.

You could see the annoyance on her pretty face as she opened the door of the wardrobe and with her own hands deigned to take out her riding costume. She had just got out of the gown her mother had laid her to sleep in, and into the breeches and jacket, all but the boots, when the castle throbbed with a sudden stir, as though a hundred people were talking at once. She pulled the bell cord so hard it nearly came away in her hand. This time the maid showed herself at the threshold.

"Where have you been?" said the Princess. "Didn't you hear me ring?"

"That's why I answered," said the girl.

"But I rang before. Where were you?"

"Right under the bell, your Highness."

The noise of voices grew louder.

"What's the matter with this house?" said the Princess.

"Nothing, your Highness."

"Don't you hear that noise?"

They both listened, and in the middle of the general racket somebody thumped on the door of the room. It was the Lord Chamberlain, and his haste was so urgent that he stuck his head in without being invited.

"The town has gone crazy, your Highness! If you look out the front windows, you'll see the townsfolk masquerading in such dress as you never laid eyes on. I stepped out myself to ascertain the cause of this frivolity, and they told me I had been asleep for a hundred years."

"That, I suppose," said the Princess, "is a figure of speech."

"Your Highness, they meant it literally; every one of us inside the walls, they say, has been dozing soundly for a hundred years. It's an extraordinary aberration, and until we find some way to cure it

I would suggest that your Highness remain indoors."

"What does my father say about it?"

"Your Highness, both your parents are unaccountably absent. We've searched the castle in vain. If by accident they ventured abroad this morning, no telling what these lunatics may have done to them. With your permission I'll call for volunteers, and we'll sally forth."

For some reason the Princess did not feel the need of her parents just then—she faced their absence with composure.

"If they should be gone till tomorrow," she said, "you could manage, couldn't you? We have food enough in the castle to sustain a siege, and all that, haven't we?"

"It's them I'm thinking of," said the chamberlain. "When the people accuse you of having been asleep for a hundred years, it almost always means a revolution."

The Princess smiled away his fears.

"It won't happen for a day or two, anyway, and by that time Father will be back to take charge.

We'll all stay indoors and amuse ourselves."

The lord chamberlain didn't like the policy, but for want of a better he gave in, and by the time evening had come, the debate had died down, and only a few townsfolk who had nothing to do loitered at the front entrance and watched the castle as though it were the scene of an accident.

After supper the Princess retired for the night. Obviously because the day's perplexities had worn her out. But when her maid brought out the night-robe, the Princess sent it back and called for her new evening gown, a delicious green thing with no sleeves to it, very little back, and not too much front. The astonished maid got it over the Princess' head and helped pull it down.

"How does it look?" said the Princess, trying to squeeze it all at once into her modest mirror.

"Wonderful, your Highness," said the girl; "but at this hour, and on this particular day, where in heaven's name will you wear it?"

"You'd better not know," said the Princess, "in case someone should ask. I shan't need you

now till morning. Goodnight—and leave me the larger candle."

When the maid was well down the corridor, the Princess drew a shawl around her and slipped through the door to the side stairs, and so to the little gate, which except during the enchantment was never shut—decent enemies in those days always appearing at the main entrance. Through the gate she hurried, and along a path she must have traveled several times before—till she came to a shadowy glade.

There was a starry sky and a rising moon to light the little circle in the trees. She stood still, or practically so, with no more motion than she needed to adjust her headdress, from time to time, or to make sure the gown was hanging straight.

From the opposite direction someone was walking cautiously, feeling his way through the forest. The Princess stood still, and pulled the shawl tighter around her head. Into the light stepped a young boy, rather above middle height, strongly built. The Princess moved out of the shadow.

"Is it you, Rudolph?"

"Of course it is! I said I'd come. Are you really on time, for once?"

The way she kissed him, he couldn't utter a syllable, but he tried, gently enough, to push her away.

"Aren't you glad to see me, Rudolph? Have you changed your mind?"

He stood before her, awkward and embarrassed. "I haven't changed my mind, but what's got into you? We aren't married yet, and I told you I was no hand for rough courting, and I don't want my girl to be, either."

"Then kiss me ever so lightly; teach me how you wish it to be!"

She threw her arms around his neck and drew him down, and his hands enfolded her, under the shawl. He started back, more embarrassed than before.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "I'm sorry I came."

For a minute she couldn't believe the words. "You shouldn't have come? What is wrong, Rudolph? Do I—disappoint you?"

He answered fiercely: "You do! You're not

what I thought, and I'll never give my promise to your kind. We'd better go home now, both of us."

He was turning away, but she seized the sleeve of his coat.

"You can't leave me now! I know you loved me last week. You'll tell me what has changed you; yes, you will!"

"Last week, you say? I've loved you for two years, and you know it well, but I thought you were a lady!"

She answered him as a king's daughter should, too proud to let him know he had wounded her, but in spite of herself a little sad.

"And tonight you think I'm not a lady?"

"You're not dressed like one!"

"Why, I wore my best gown, just for you!"

She threw back the shawl and stepped away from him, for the perspective. In the dimness he missed the details at first, but when he had grasped them all he laughed. Rather disagreeably, too.

"Well, it's not so bad as I feared. I thought you had come in nothing but the shawl."

Quickly she covered her shoulders again. "I—I thought this was the dress you liked, Rudolph; and I thought you wanted me. I'm mistaken. I shan't trouble you further."

With a charming dignity she was turning back toward the castle.

"Why do you say I liked it when I never saw it before? Nor none of your family, if I know them! Your father never caught you in it, I swear."

She found him suddenly intolerable. "Rudolph, you're a peasant, after all! The fineness I imagined in you doesn't exist! You asked me here for nothing but to humiliate me!"

"I came here a decent man to have a word with a modest sweetheart, and maybe an innocent kiss or two, as you gave when I said I loved you, yesterday morning."

"Yesterday morning?"

"It's you that want to humiliate me! Of course yesterday morning, in the cow house! As though you didn't remember! And why shouldn't I be a peasant? Did you think I was a gentleman? I'm

not; I want no liberties with my girl before I can marry her!"

It was too dark for him to see that she was trembling, and perhaps he would not have cared.

"We remember differently," she said. "That's the kindest way to put it. You think we met yesterday morning—or do you really think so, Rudolph? I can't forget another night—here—a week ago. You loved me then; you didn't think me too bold; you asked me to wear this gown, for your sake."

He listened, astounded. She pleaded once more.

"You said you would like to see how beautiful I was."

He cleared his throat. When he answered it was in a hoarse whisper. "You *are* beautiful tonight—I never saw you so lovely—but you're not behaving like yourself, not the way my bride must behave. What's got into you, Clothilde?"

"Clothilde?"

"That's your name, isn't it?"

"It is not!"

"Oh, it isn't, eh? Since when?"

They faced each other, motionless.

"Rudolph, you promised to love me truly and forever."

"Well, so I will—or I would have."

"But you promised to be gentle, and some day, when we could run off and be married——"

"Rubbish! Why should we run away? What are you trying to say? Do you want to scare me, so you can back out? All right, go on home! But you didn't need to come at all, then—leastways, not in that dress!"

She could bear no more; her heart was breaking. "Good-by, Rudolph! I shan't embarrass you longer. When I came before, and you took me in your arms, you said—but it makes no difference now."

He smote the side of his head with his hand. "I didn't know a woman could be so mean! I never did a thing but kiss you, that once, yesterday morning, and it was only on the forehead, too!"

She turned away. He called after her.

"If you speak to your father about this, I'll tell him my side of it."

She wheeled around. "But you wouldn't dare; he'd cut your head off; he'd never understand our—our point of view!"

"Who would cut my head off?"

"The King!"

For a moment her words struck him dumb; then his manner turned suddenly tender and affectionate. He came near, and though she drew away, he managed to enclose her protectingly in his arms—on the outside of the shawl.

"Clothilde, my dear, my dear! You're—you're not losing your mind, are you? My Lord, girl, you don't think there's a king, do you?"

It was her turn to be terrified; the chamberlain's remark about revolutions came to her mind.

"Tell me the truth, Rudolph—has anything happened to the King?"

He shook his head, and she could see the immense pity in his eyes.

"Rudolph, is the King dead?"

"Why, it isn't what you'd call news, Clothilde; he died about ninety years ago. I had no idea he was a friend of yours."

"He was my father."

The boy knew then her wits were gone. He could feel her, cold and limp in his arms. Gently he pressed her to him, awestruck at the catastrophe of their wooing.

"If anything I did or said, Clothilde——"

She disengaged herself and stepped away. "I don't know who you are," she said. "Forgive me for speaking so frankly to a stranger. You're not in the least to blame . . . I was to meet my lover here tonight, but he could not wait for me."

Before he could answer, she had disappeared in the footpath toward the castle, and he stared at the shadows which had engulfed her. He was still in that posture when a strong warm hand touched his.

"Clothilde!"

"I'm surprised you think I'd speak to you, after that! Who is she?"

"I don't know."

"My, but you're the careless man! I saw you kiss her."

"Now, don't go to be jealous! She was just telling me. It was her mistake."

"She's right! I'll be making no more such mistakes myself!"

"Now, Clothilde!"

"Well, what would you think of such doings if you were in my place, watching you busy with a strange woman?"

"Clothilde, she's crazy; clean out of her wits."

"The more shame on you!"

"Don't answer me so. I've done nothing I oughtn't to. She was looking for another man, her lover, but he didn't come."

"So she made the best of you?"

"Now, if you really listened, you must have heard we were only explaining the mistake to each other. And if you'd been on time yourself——"

She reached up for a kiss, and he knew he had hit on the telling argument.

"I always have to wait for you!"

She changed the subject. "How do you know she's crazy?"

"She says her father is King of this country."

"My word!"

"And you should have seen the dress she wore: no sleeves, and nothing to speak of in front or back. When I put my hand around her——"

Clothilde seized him by the arm and started him off with her toward the place they had come from. "I'll never be late again," she said.

They were busy a while, picking their way through the woods, with the moon not as bright as it had been.

"Rudolph, was she beautiful?"

"Her bosom——"

"That's enough! You shouldn't have noticed such things!"

A week or so later the Prince called at the castle again. The melancholy had grown on him so fast that he couldn't stay away. His purpose was to feed his heartache with a glance at the fatal little gate through which he had come at that beauty, his ideal, but not for him. The gate, however, had not yet been mended, and he stuck a foot in to refresh the sadness that had overtaken him when he came down the stairs.

At the moment there was no one going up or down, and he went as far as the landing to recall the pain with which he had come out of the Princess' chamber. Not a soul was in the hall, the Princess having demanded quiet, and he forced himself to the last agony of peeking in through her door, to the very shrine of his sorrow.

There on the top of the bed lay the Princess, busy with her afternoon nap. The coincidence was too striking for him to spoil any of it. He leaned over, and this time his kiss woke her. It might well have awakened anybody. The way she sat up, he could see she was surprised.

"Who are you?" said she.

"In my lesser capacity I am a Prince."

"And when you're at your best, what are you?"

"I'm at my best now; I am your lover."

The Princess got her feet on the ground, stood up to smooth out her gown, put her hands to the top of her head, to make sure her hair was in order. Then she looked him over carefully, and if she didn't like him, she must have had a strong

social gift, for she put him at his ease as a guest should be.

"I had no reason to expect you," she said, "and perhaps you'll explain how you got here."

"Since you are here," said he, "I'd have to explain if I were anywhere else."

She shook a warning finger at him. "I'm used to that sort of thing; it means nothing. I don't believe in love at first sight."

"That theory," said the Prince, "we need not discuss, for I've seen you before."

She turned suspicious. "You may be thinking of someone else," she said. "I have no recollection of you."

"You wouldn't; your mind was on another man. You were murmuring his name. Discouragement drove me into exile, but the memory of you has brought me back."

His mention of the other man turned her at once into a thoughtful mood.

"I don't usually wear my heart on my sleeve," said she. "If there had been a name, I would never have murmured it."

"Now that's a fair test," said the Prince. "If I say the right name, will you be mine?"

She was reluctant to commit herself.

"I'll mention the name anyway," said he, "to verify my tale. It was Rudolph."

The Princess' eyes turned sad, but they were all the more beautiful for that. "Do I understand that you loved me once, and because of Rudolph you went into exile? How long have you been away?"

"It seems," said the Prince, "at least a hundred years, but if you want the literal truth from me, I believe it was just the other day."

The Princess was interested. "*You* can't tell the difference, either?"

"The difference," said the Prince, "is immaterial. In love, a bad day is a tedious year, and the right kind of month is shorter than a minute. Face to face with you, I fear that life will come to an end before the next tick of that very audible clock in your father's hall. Say Yes quickly, before we have lost a thousand years."

Of course there was no sound defense against a wooing so handsome. Modestly she held out her hand for him to kiss, but he was too fine a gentleman to disappoint her that way. Her lips were even more wonderful when she was awake, because he could see her eyes.

"I'd like to ask you one thing," he said, "though it's of no pressing importance. Who *is* Rudolph? I'd be glad to recognize him, in case we ever meet."

"He is a memory," said the Princess, "or an illusion."

The Prince grew thoughtful. "In either case he might be dangerous."

"Poor fellow!" said the Princess. "He isn't dangerous at all; he is dead."

The Prince was wise for his age. "Even at that——" he began.

But his eyes were on her, and what he saw made him wiser still. He kissed her again, and wondered why a living man should be jealous of a ghost.

CONVERSION

CONVERSION

Messire Thibaut was a great man. And so young! He was the richest lord in his part of the country, master of acres and cattle, and husband to the handsomest lady of her time. What more could he want?

Well, for one thing, he wanted a son. There ought to be someone to inherit the property and carry on the name. Could all this wealth be said to have value if the Thibaut family were not to control it? Wouldn't he and his wife look well, carved on the top of their tombs, with their toes symmetrically pointed and their hands folded in prayer—and all the time a stranger, a distant cousin, taking his ease in their best castle! At thirty-five Messire Thibaut began to bend a little under the weight of disappointment.

His wife was touched by the same shadow at the same time, though she was but thirty. Not a

gray hair showed as yet among her raven locks—nor among his, for that matter, but she felt that youth had passed, and in vain. On general principles she had wanted children, enough of them to fill up the table in the castle hall. Daughters, of course, as well as sons. Her husband would have been satisfied with an heir, but she had the temperament for a large family.

Moreover, if there had been several boys, the eldest could have succeeded his father, and some younger brother, inheriting brains from her, could have been a priest. She hadn't what you'd call a mystical nature, but she was devoted to the church. Fanatically so. She never failed to attend mass, and she delighted to distribute her husband's money in substantial offerings. If ever a proper, capable, administrative, aggressive and efficient wife earned the right to have children, it was she. When her thirtieth birthday reminded her of lapsing time, she began to ask why children were denied her. She addressed herself to the question profoundly, of course, seeking the cause behind the cause.

For a mind so direct, the solution was easy; it was her husband's fault. His attitude toward the church was abominable, and Heaven was seeing to it that no second generation imitated his skepticism.

A disinterested observer, be it said, might have been less harsh with Messire Thibaut. Essentially his religion was sound, however careless his observance of feasts and fasts. Though he rarely went to mass, yet as he once told his wife, he stayed away in good faith. But she asked herself how the son of such a man could conscientiously become a priest; by gradual stages she approached the sad truth—there never would be a son till her husband saw the error of his ways.

She explained her point of view one day after dinner, while they were enjoying the castle garden. He was fond of her, in spite of the hand with which she ruled him. She really was beautiful—tall and buxom. He tugged at his mustache to keep from smiling, as she laid before him her version of the divine strategy; he was to remain childless until he had confessed his sins to Father Constant, and had

heavily endowed the neighboring shrines. After this atonement, a son would be permitted.

"Blanche," said Thibaut, "even if I were as bad as you say, wouldn't it be a little unjust to punish such an admirable woman as you? If absence from mass renders me childless, think what a progeny should be yours, who attend as regularly as the priest himself. A fair average, now——"

"Scoff if you like," said his wife, "but it doesn't become you and it's no kindness to me. You know I want a son. How can you refrain from doing what I've suggested? Even if there's no other result, you will have made your peace with God."

He didn't like to answer a plea so serious, yet he foresaw trouble if he gave in. She wanted him to offer Father Constant half the property, or thereabouts, if the church would guarantee a son. She said it in other terms, but that was what she meant. Father Constant was a good man, but for the church's sake he would probably accept any reasonable offer, and if the Thibaut estate should be dissipated in the purchase of an heir, what would

the said heir inherit? Even if he arrived, that is; and to his coming so many agencies must contribute, you couldn't be sure what the transfer of deeds and mortgages had to do with it, nor what the blessing of the church could avail. He and Blanche had been blessed once already, at their wedding. Messire Thibaut accounted for the lack of children by a theory of his own, not for publication.

"Peace with God is an excellent thing," he said. "Suppose we begin cautiously. I'll go down to Father Constant and confess my sins, the ones I remember best, and we'll see if anything happens."

"That's what I'm asking you to do! And be sure to make your penitential offering."

"I'll save that up till later. It may have a better effect, in case I have to try again."

"Ah, your niggardly heart!" she said. "If I'm so familiar with it, how obvious it must be to God! He won't forgive you, Thibaut."

"Well, in that case there'll be plenty of time to reconsider. The main emphasis ought to be on the sins and the penitence."

"The sins need no emphasis! The ones I know of would blight any soul, and if you add those I suspect——"

Messire Thibaut pulled at his mustaches again. The allusion wakened happy thoughts.

"My dear wife, the escapades of my youth were expiated long ago."

"I'd like to know when, and how!"

"By matrimony." He kissed her hastily, to atone. "After all, Blanche, even if my sins are the cause—and I admit they may be—your confounded jealousy is also sin, and worse than mine. Jealousy is an offense of the spirit."

"In my case," she said, "it's a duty. It would be sin only if it were groundless."

"This repartee isn't getting us anywhere. Just what do you want me to do?"

"Go to Father Constant, confess whatever won't shock him too much, and make a generous gift, to prove your repentance."

He considered a moment. "About how much would you think right?"

"The southern farms, and the lands across the river, to begin with."

"Good Lord, Blanche, those are the best I have!"

"You should offer your best."

"Blanche, if I give so much, and we do have a son, he'll be a poor man!"

"That's as you look at it. He'll have a respectable father at last, and to enter the religious life he won't need wealth."

"I won't make a priest of him, if that's what you mean. He'll be a man of arms and of affairs, like all my people. Enter the religious life! Do you ask me to sacrifice my self-respect, confess as sins what any man knows are the natural pastimes of good society, and give away my property, all to impose on the world another shaved head and dusty cassock? You must think I've lost my mind!"

"Your soul, Thibaut. Your mind is no feebler than one would have the right to expect."

She walked into the castle, with dignity, and left him there. He understood the gesture. In his younger days he had supposed these stinging exits

marked, as it were, the abandonment of the subject. Now he recognized the close of the prelude, the pleasanter part of the debate.

When he reached the village church, Father Constant was leaving it, but at sight of Messire Thibaut he returned to the confessional. His white hair was matched by wisdom within. If he was surprised, he didn't show it. If the habitual formulas of the confessional came to his tongue, he put them away. Messire Thibaut, he knew, would need special handling.

"Father, it's some time since I've been in this place."

"Son, I'm wondering what mercy of God brought you now."

"It isn't the mercy of God, Father, it's my wife. She wants a child."

Father Constant reflected for a second or two. Messire Thibaut was embarrassed to observe several kneeling figures at a shrine near by. He regretted he had spoken so loud.

"Then it isn't penitence that brings you?"

"No," whispered Thibaut, "it's ambition. Hers more than mine. She's a hard woman to satisfy, Father. So persistent! When she really wants a thing——"

"I'll hear about her faults from her. Your own soul will be burden enough for you, my son."

"That's true too, yet she can't be left out of the story. She hasn't a child, and she blames me. Is that just?"

"Son, how do I know? It may be."

"Well, she thinks you do know. She thinks if I confess my sins, you can absolve me in some special way, so that the family may be increased."

Father Constant studied this proposal. "The authority of the church," he said, "is to minister to sick souls. If you came here for general conversation, my son, you are abusing a divine privilege. Remember how plain your duty is, and how simple my office. Repent, and be forgiven."

"But it isn't so simple after all. She expects me to confess not only the sins I've committed, but whatever she has invented for me besides."

"Confess your true sins, my son, and God will be content."

"My wife won't be. She wants that child of ours to be a living witness against me—proof that at last I owned up to all her suspicions. There's another matter, too—she wants me to make a generous offering to the church."

"I see no objection to that," said Father Constant, "if you are so disposed."

"But what has that to do with the child?"

"I don't follow you, son."

"Well, man to man, if I give you my best lands, do I become a parent?"

"Preposterous!"

"That's what I thought, Father. My wife sent me to confess and give you half my property, with the clear understanding that in return she is to be a mother. At least, if she isn't, I shall never convince her I really confessed and made the gift."

"I see the dilemma, my son. But you ought not to let your domestic exigencies obscure your theology. The favors of Heaven are not to be

bought or sold. I have never counted you among the devoted children of the church; if now you are penitent, and if you also wish to make an offering, well and good. The size of your family is a matter apart. No doubt it may, as your wife suspects, be related to your past life and your soul's health, but many a saintly man has been childless too. Don't confuse the problems."

There was a pause. Thibaut was wondering how he could tell Blanche the mission had failed.

"I suppose," he said, "if I gave the church some fertile lands, it wouldn't prejudice the other cause?"

"Which, my son?"

"Having the child."

"Thibaut, the two enterprises are entirely distinct. Your gift will neither hinder nor help. It might, however, be a satisfactory expression of remorse."

"I suppose it would do no harm to confess my sins, while I'm here."

"No harm, my son! What a curious phrase for God's forgiveness!"

"I mean, it will remove one possible source of discord. Where shall I begin, Father?"

Blanche was waiting in the garden, to hear his success.

"You did the right thing at last, Thibaut. We shall have the child."

"Oh, I'm not at all sure—neither is the priest. He says you mustn't confuse the problems."

"If he knew you better, Thibaut, he'd know the problems couldn't be more confused than they are."

"My dear, he does know me better." A smile showed under the long mustaches.

"What are you laughing to yourself about?"

"I asked whether I should confess only the sins I had committed, or include also the ones you attribute to me. When I got through he marveled at your acquaintance with evil, if you could add anything to the facts."

"Thibaut, I know you like a book. You hid something from him! You are not yet forgiven."

As the months went by, he seemed not to be. No child appeared, and the argument began again.

She felt he had weakened his case in the eyes of Heaven by a half-hearted repentance. The gift had been made; as Thibaut put it, the property was gone for good. Nothing could be hoped from further donations. This time it must be something desperate and spectacular.

"I can't go back to him again, Blanche—not so soon. All the old sins are settled for, and you don't give me enough rope to commit a new one."

"Thibaut, you couldn't have told him all! Ask him for the worst penance he ever gave anybody. We've no time to lose."

"True enough. I'll waste none of mine on a foolish errand."

It was not surprising, therefore, that he entered the church door, next day, and sought Father Constant.

"You know why I've come, Father."

"I fear I do."

"Father, think up something extreme, something dangerous, something so thoroughgoing that if I haven't a son when I get through, at least the sub-

ject will be exhausted. If by chance the discipline involves absence from home, I shall try to endure the temporary loneliness."

Father Constant left the confessional and walked up and down the aisle with him, to permit freer play of promiscuous ideas.

"My son, there are men in the priesthood who would have given other advice than mine. In sincerity they would have accepted your gifts, and to some extent promised the fulfillment of your wishes. I can't do it. For all I know, you may die childless. Yet I may be wrong—at times I question whether I lack faith. Just now there is stir about the new shrine of St. James—sick folks have been cured there, and certain disappointed people have made pilgrimages and afterwards have had their own way. I don't know. The church can't insure an answer to prayer. That is, not a tangible, physical answer."

"Is the shrine far?"

"Very—a thousand miles at the least."

"I'll go."

"Go armed, then," said Father Constant. "It's dangerous country, and some of the pilgrims never get there at all."

"Would it imply a lack of faith if I took along a strong guard? It would give me little pleasure to have a son if I couldn't live to see him."

He really wasn't frightened. Indeed, the journey was rather alluring. He armed five of his most reliable men, and provided mules for the baggage and the treasure. When the day came for departure, he was so excited he had to pull his mustaches nearly off before he achieved the right expression of regret to bid Blanche farewell. When he found her in the ladies' tower, however, her appearance startled him into sincere ejaculations.

"What in Heaven's name are you up to, Blanche? Are those my clothes you have on?"

She was just arranging his second best hat over her thick black hair.

"This costume is most convenient for the rough travel Father Constant predicts. Besides, it might

happen to protect me. Don't I look like a man?"

She did, if you didn't go into particulars, but Thibaut had no mind for compliments.

"Blanche, you're not going with me!"

"What makes you think so? Am I not as much concerned in this child as you?"

"Blanche, it's a wild journey, and I can make the prayers and the offering for us both."

"You can't make them for me! In prayer, Thibaut, you are unpracticed and unskilful. Get me a good horse—I'm ready now."

He and she rode in front, with the five attendants close at hand, and the mules following. The mules delayed them. More than once Thibaut wished he had left the baggage at home, but as Blanche remarked, they couldn't make a proper offering at the shrine unless they had the money in hand, so to speak. Thibaut was reminded of his lost farms, and would have renewed the debate as to the efficacy of prayer without gifts, if his men had not been so near. He was in a bad humor. His wife's company provided neither inspiration nor solace.

Her extraordinary attire interested the men, of course—indeed it set out her person to great advantage, revealing symmetries which had hitherto been concealed. Her husband disapproved of this result, and of the manners, too, which she adopted with the clothes. Until now she had always been gentle, however masterful, but astride of her horse she became unnecessarily bold.

When they came to a swollen river, for example, and found the bridge washed away, he was for going back or for waiting till another bridge was put up, but in the presence of his men she told him he was chicken-livered, or words to that effect, and before he could stop her she had driven in the spurs and swum her horse to the other side. So there was nothing for it but to follow. In the passage they lost one of the mules, the one carrying her feminine garments. He was distressed to think of her wearing breeches at the shrine—in fact, he expressed a doubt whether the priest would let her in. Her reply struck him as flippant; the priest, she said, would see before him not a woman but a

travel-stained pilgrim—men went on pilgrimages too—and God would listen to her prayer no matter what she had on.

The same reckless spirit marked her behavior the night they nearly froze on the mountain, and that other night at the inn, when the host mistook her for a prince traveling incognito, with Thibaut for squire. During the freezing she tended the fire, gathered wood from impossible thickets, told stories to cheer them up—and he had never guessed she knew those particular anecdotes. One of the men, willing to contribute what he could to the general heightening of spirits, recounted an adventure which Thibaut would have protested, if his teeth hadn't been chattering too much. Blanche only laughed. He apologized to her the next day, when they were thawed out.

"I never knew him to forget himself before. The cold must have undermined his taste."

"My dear Thibaut, I've no quarrel with his taste. Such things, I understand, do happen in the world, and he told it with remarkable gusto."

"But before a lady, Blanche—and on a pilgrimage! Another sort of meditation, one would suppose——"

"Thibaut, don't tell me how to behave on a pilgrimage! You're a nice one to talk."

At the inn her boldness was more subtle. As soon as she understood the innkeeper's error, she playfully enjoyed it. In the most public way she gave orders to her husband, some of them decidedly menial in their general drift, which he couldn't reply to without calling attention to her masquerade. No doubt the men would whisper the news in the kitchen, but he preferred not to inform strangers that this handsome young man with the bold tongue was his wife. He hoped to expostulate at night, as soon as they should be alone, but she ordered an inferior room for him, and retired with formality to what the inn people afterwards referred to as the state chamber.

He was still troubled by her behavior when they reached the forest, the worst stretch of the journey. The path was difficult to trace, among so many

bushes, but she would push on, even when he suspected they were off the track. They had a downright quarrel over one fork in the road, where either way looked hopeless. She settled the matter, as usual.

"Go anywhere you like, Thibaut, or stay here—I intend to finish this pilgrimage before I'm an old woman."

She led off, toward the right, and unless he had wanted to stop her by force, there was nothing to do but go along.

"Blanche, I won't be responsible for what may happen! We're completely lost."

"Come on behind me, then—I'll get you out."

While he was still nursing a grievance, the brigands appeared. He saw the leader first, then the rest of the band immediately. The leader was an immense man with the reddest of red hair and a dynamic personality. One would have suspected him of being a heavy eater if his figure had not been so athletic. Inexhaustible energy perhaps counterbalanced unlimited appetite. An invincible sort of man, amiably disposed toward himself.

Thibaut called on his men at arms and led them to the assault, if the word is not too ambitious for what happened. The red bandit himself knocked the fellows on the head, one by one, and the minor brigands bound Thibaut and his wife and searched the plunder. Thibaut's heart sank as his jewels and gold were spread out on the ground for inventory. It would have been a large fortune to throw away on the church, he thought, and now to have it snatched by thieves, just because his wife——

"This isn't enough!" shouted the red-headed bandit. "They never come so far with so little. Hand over the rest!"

"It's all I have," said Thibaut. "You may search me if you like."

"Good idea," said the bandit. "Search him!"

Thibaut expected them to go through his pockets, but he didn't know the bandit. They took each article off before they examined it. Blanche was sorry for her husband as they got to the ultimate garments; he looked unheroic, shivering there. Then, though it wasn't necessary, they stripped him

completely and let him stand several minutes, naked and indignant, while they decided whether it wouldn't be safest to kill him. The good-natured chief with the red hair spared his life.

"I don't like to kill a man except in fight," he said. "Never commit an unnecessary murder. That's what my mother taught me. Besides, the flies will look after him."

As he finished speaking, his men grasped Thibaut by a hand and a foot and swung him around a few times like a skipping rope. Let go at last, he flew through the air and landed in an immense thicket of briars. Blanche's heart ached at his groans, but she had little leisure for pity.

"Now, Sir," said the chief bandit, "you too, no doubt, are delighted to be searched."

"I am not!" said Blanche. "I'll die before you——"

"This one has the treasure on his person," said the bandit. "Search him."

She made a good struggle, but it was useless.

When they had got past the outer garments they became so suspicious that they didn't stop to examine, they simply took them off. Standing before them at last, she wished she might die. She couldn't know at that moment how handsome she was, nor how nearly the thieves were reduced to decent emotions by the unexpected revelation. The red-headed leader was the first to recover himself.

"This isn't the sort of wealth we were looking for, Madam, but it's none the less welcome. My men embarrass you—forgive their intrusion. If you'll permit them to gather up this unimportant debris, they will go at once."

To judge by their expression, they didn't like to go at once, but they obeyed the hint. The forest was silent, except for Thibaut's groans, which were rhythmic and egotistic. The bandit stood off a foot or two, to have a good view of Blanche, and she looked at him.

"For God's sake, kill me!" she said.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I can't, Madam. Before

such beauty as yours I always become ridiculously tender-hearted. I can't even toss you into the briars—our usual hospitality, which you have the right to expect. But there's a patch of softer bushes near by, if I can locate it——"

He picked her up in his arms and went looking for the softer bushes.

When he let her go, she lay still and tried to make herself believe she was dead. She heard him get on his horse and ride away. Then, rather faint, she heard Thibaut's groans. She never could face him again! If he got out of the briars, she must be dead when he found her! Immediate suicide—nothing else could be endured! But though she made several attempts, she discovered that suicide isn't easy, not in the primitive forest. There were plenty of trees to hang herself on, but nothing to hang with. No cliff to jump off. Life stared her in the face.

Thibaut was still groaning. Perhaps she ought to release him from the briars and let him kill her, as of course he would. Both would then be bene-

fited. . . . But by the time she had got him out, she discovered his ignorance of what had happened. He had been too busy with the briars. Well, what was the use of making a bad matter worse by talking about it?

The woodcutter who found them the next day supplied clothes, and at the nearest town Thibaut borrowed enough, partly on worldly credit and partly on pity, to complete the journey, either to the shrine or back home. Blanche was for home; her interest in the pilgrimage had ended.

"Don't you want the child?" said her husband.

"I don't want anything," said the poor woman.

"The bandits have unbalanced her mind," thought Thibaut. Then out loud: "You'll feel better when we get there. The fact that we were spared is miraculous, when you come to think of it. I understand that band never leave a victim to tell the tale. I recognize a good omen."

She had lost her masterful tone, so they completed the journey, as he wished, made their prayers and vows, and promised a generous offer-

ing as soon as he could get in touch with his supplies. The return journey was unbelievably easy.

And after an interval they knew they would have a child.

The prospect affected Thibaut profoundly. Father Constant came on him, day after day, kneeling at some shrine or other in the village church, renewing his thanks. He was ready to admit now that his wife was right—he had been callous to higher things, he had neglected his soul, Heaven had disciplined him, but praise to God, he had repented in time! Blanche awaited parenthood with other emotions. She had become very taciturn, she who had insisted on the last word and on most of the earlier ones too. She developed a strange reluctance to join her husband at church. When he pointed out the direct intervention of the heavenly mercy, she betrayed symptoms of irritability. Thibaut understood that women in her state were often queer.

When the child was born, she expressed no desire to see it. Thibaut neglected his affairs to hold the infant in his arms by the hour.

"It's the image of you, Blanche, don't you think?"

She didn't think so. She appeared not to care what it looked like.

"The light hair, of course, isn't your coloring, but they say hair almost always begins light and turns dark. He has your chin."

She was looking out of the window, at the distant forest.

"By the way, I've sent off that offering to the shrine. Twice as much as we promised."

She turned suddenly indignant. "Thibaut, if you throw away the property, we shan't have a cent! No doubt it's stored up in Heaven, but how are we to get on while we're here?"

"You don't mean you object to offerings? You?"

"In reason, Thibaut, but you've lost what little sense you had. What can the shrine do with so much treasure? Absurd!"

Her strong language made him feel that her old temperament was reestablished, and from habit he said no more. He spent his days with the child,

who adored him, and when his wife wasn't around, he gave to the church whatever he could spare at the moment. He was glad to see that as the boy grew older, he developed gentle traits and a sweet disposition. It was what one would expect from his miraculous origin. Blanche watched his development too, but with less confidence.

When the boy was three years old, he was playing one day in the garden, and his happy father was looking on from the gallery above.

"Come here, Blanche—isn't he a dear!"

Blanche came, but did not commit herself.

"Have you noticed his exquisite tastes? Butterflies—and flowers—everything delicate. When I think what a rough man I was before he came, I realize how little I deserve him."

He was moved to tears, but his wife remained calm.

"Blanche, I've something on my mind. I owe it to you that my soul was saved. It isn't simply the joy of having the child—my soul really is

rescued from a sort of death. You'll be glad to hear what I've been thinking of. You know, I wanted an heir to the property, and all that, and I made a harsh remark about priests. But the more I realize the goodness of Heaven in forgiving me and sending the boy, the more I'm convinced I owe him to the church. My worldly ambition is finished. His place is at the altar."

Blanche gave a nervous little shriek.

"Never, Thibaut! It would be desecration!"

He looked at her, to see if insanity showed on the outside. "Will you please explain why it would be desecration?"

"I can't, Thibaut—it's just a feeling I have. He doesn't come from what I'd call a priestlike ancestry."

She thought she had confessed the whole thing, and rather counted on him to annihilate her. But he seemed relieved.

"No, I'm a poor father for anything churchly, I admit, but I've reformed, Blanche, and the boy will plead for me."

She went off into an hysterical laugh.

"It isn't funny too, is it? Very well, it's funny. But he's going to be a priest."

"He is not!"

"Well, we needn't decide it today. He's young yet."

But by the time he was sixteen years old, Blanche knew the decision had been made, very gradually and without words. The boy and his father thought alike on all points, they lived the same life, they were rarely apart for more than a few minutes of the day. She was not surprised when they faced her together, in the great hall of the castle. The presence of the boy gave Thibaut courage.

"Blanche, if he's to study for the church, he ought to begin soon, and he and I have been talking about the right city to send him to, and the most learned seminary. Have you any suggestions?"

As they stood together, she noticed how dark the boy's hair had turned, and how much he resembled Thibaut. It startled her. No, she had no suggestions, except that perhaps he ought to stay at home

and serve the world in a humble way. The youth and his father regarded her with pity.

"You were once a pious woman, Blanche. I never expected the day when you would disapprove of the priesthood for a son of yours."

"I never expected it either, but it's come."

"You'll leave the decision to the boy, I suppose?"

"I will not! I will protest to the Bishop!"

"I've been talking with the Bishop myself, Blanche, and I took occasion to explain that you and I have exchanged positions as to the church. He thinks that in saving my soul you may have overstrained yourself, as it were, and become susceptible to my former spiritual handicaps. How does that strike you? In any case, the Bishop accepts the boy as a candidate, and I've made a thank-offering of——"

"Is there enough left to buy food with, Thibaut?"

Before her son left her, she had a quiet talk with him, to no purpose, as it turned out.

"Surely you wouldn't think of the priesthood without examining your heart, my dear boy. Are you certain a holy life will satisfy you?"

"Nothing else will, Mother."

"Have you no impulses, from time to time, of a——" It was hard to say, and she hesitated a long while. "I mean, the appeal of the senses is strong in men—in some men. A priest should know nothing of such temptations."

"I hope to know nothing of them, Mother."

"Don't you sometimes wish——" It was too hard for her again. "You know, you've seen nothing of women, except the servants and me. If great beauty were suddenly revealed to you——"

"Mother, your questions show no faith in my virtue. Have you reason to think I shan't keep my vows?"

"My dear boy, if you take them, you must keep them, but examine your heart first. Have you ever thought it might be pleasant to——"

He was mildly indignant. "Mother, why don't you ask me if I shouldn't like to murder someone, once in a while?"

"Don't tell me you really want to!"

He knew his father's suspicions were correct—she *was* unbalanced.

"Give me your blessing, dear Mother, and pray for me, and let me pray for you."

"I can't let you go! Even if you are innocent now, it will appear later, at the very altar, or in the confessional, or at a deathbed!"

Her vehemence astounded him.

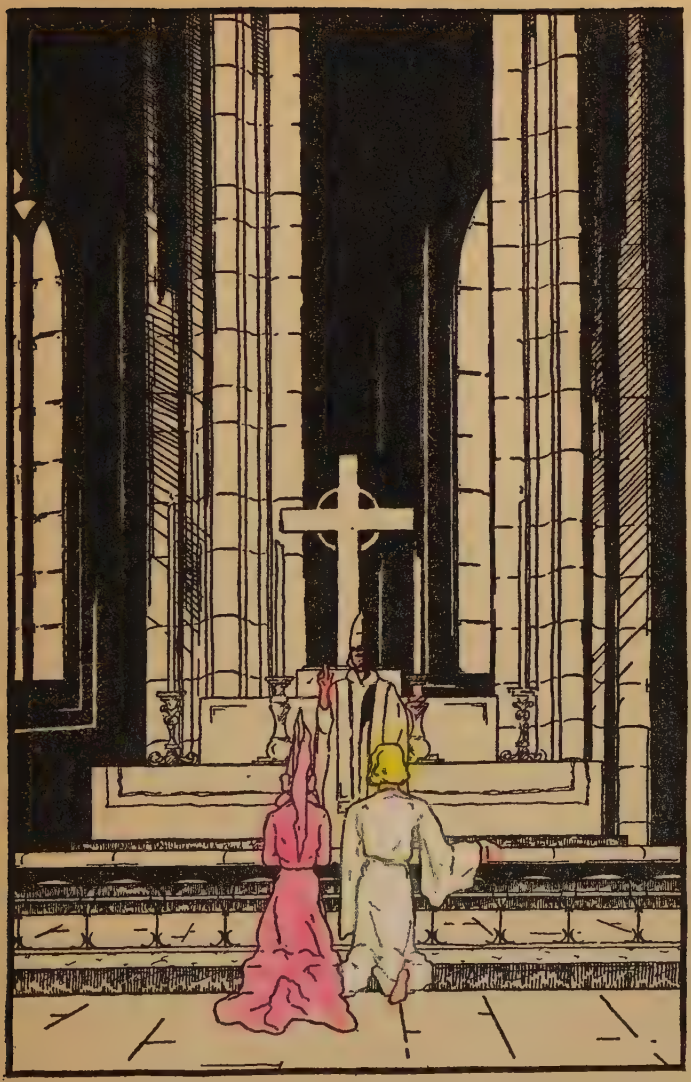
"Mother, I really believe you think my soul is occupied by secret devils, who will break out some day."

"Yes," she said, "that's what I fear."

The look on her face made him serious for the rest of his life. When he thought of the problem of evil, he always remembered his own mother, a woman who led a sheltered existence, a woman of piety and admirable background, who nevertheless was beset with villainous thoughts. He learned to be gentle with the really fallen, the sinners who without her advantages gave way to temptation.

In short, he was a saint—his father's blessing and the illumination of his age. When they made

him a bishop, both parents attended the consecration, Thibaut incoherent with joy, Blanche wondering whether she ought to be proud, and if so, what of. As she watched them in the shadows and lights of the cathedral, she was further perplexed by the fact that, except for the young priest's raven locks and Thibaut's snow-white hair, they were as alike as two peas.



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PETER KILLS THE BEAR

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BEFORE Peter de Bearn took to himself a wife and founded a home, he had to develop a philosophy which would reconcile him with the world. He was brother to the famous Count Gascon de Foix, but in some respects more memorable, with a keener energy to live, and a friendlier way with his fellows. Also he had wealth, not excessive but sufficient. Like his brother he was a lover of dogs and horses, a skilled breeder of fine animals, a tireless hunter. What you call an out-of-doors man.

Also he was a—well, he used a plain word for it, without flinching, but in these squeamish days it is best to say it round-about. His mother wasn't related to his father, aside from bearing him a son, which both she and the said male parent considered an incident. Those were rough and imperfect times, which we must handle deftly in our

speech and with allowance of pity in our hearts. She was a very beautiful girl, without a history. Peter's father met her only once, while absent from home on an important errand of public service. She had the misfortune to die when the child was born.

Whether Peter ever regretted his motherless state, we have no way of telling. His father, we are informed, he admired. Every age has its own standards; since we all must have a father of some kind, he was glad he had a good one, a distinguished person, healthy, wealthy, and of a cordial disposition.

Whatever ill-will Peter nursed was for his brother Gascon, his elder by a few months. At least, during boyhood and early youth he failed to understand why the rightful heir should be the favored son. Some of the womenfolk around the castle hinted to him that Gascon merited his privileges by his superior behavior, and Peter had to admit that his brother made less noise indoors and out, dirtied his clothes less often, and was more

likely to appear at table with washed hands. Gascon, in short, was a good boy. His mother, the Countess, herself pointed out this fact to Peter. She must have known, because her own behavior was beyond criticism. She regarded Peter as an affliction.

When he was twelve or fourteen, a casual word illuminated for him the state of life to which by God's pleasure he had been called. It was in the village church, under the castle. The Count rarely attended mass, but his conscientious wife took the boys to hear sermons. Gascon would sit like a little graven image, with his eye on the pulpit and his thoughts on what was good for his soul. Peter would have liked to listen, but his foot usually went to sleep, the seat became woefully hard, he grew prickly and hot inside. Once when he yawned audibly, the Countess was obliged to fetch him a sounding cuff on the ear. Later, at the castle dinner table, he was unable to recall the text. He was annoyed at Gascon for having it at the end of his tongue. It was something about the kind of

people who inherit the best lands. The preacher had called them the meek. The episode at the dinner table and the cuff on the ear printed the word in Peter's memory. His father, the Countess, and Gascon were the meek.

But when he was twelve or fourteen, he woke up suddenly one day in the midst of Father Constant's lecture. The good priest was expounding the carnal sins, and the boy realized that religion was interesting at last. Father Constant ran no risk of being misunderstood; he illustrated every point, so that even a child could follow, yet in the kindness of his heart and in the tradition of mercy he paid nature her due, and admitted that his congregation, through Adam's fault rather than their own, were beset with temptations. Peter came away with an enormous respect for nature. He grasped the difference between Gascon and himself, but from that moment he ceased to be envious. He and his brother were both, it appeared, children of sin, but he was a special case, in a sense distinguished, whereas Gascon was normal and or-

dinary. If he caught the priest's meaning, his father had run grave risk of hell on his behalf. He had always liked his father.

The breeding of horses and dogs, a chief industry on his father's estate, now became significant of larger matters. This too, if he understood the good priest, was the work of nature, his father and the grooms only cooperating. Nature, a vast and vague goddess who caused children to be born, and dogs and horses. The danger of hell arose when the goddess functioned without Father Constant's permission. He must have given his permission for the dogs and horses; their appearance, at regular sessions, stimulated in no one, so far as Peter could observe, a sense of iniquity. As he grew older he felt brotherly toward the animals.

But he did question, from time to time, why his father, who lent such aid to nature in the matter of birth, should take an equal delight in killing. There was always a hunt of some kind, or if not a hunt, a war. His father loved to kill deer, or when occasion served, a bear. If a dog was wounded

in the chase, his father would be angry, but the carcass of stag or boar or bear he would display with great pride in the yard of the castle. If one of the men died in a fight, his father would be still angrier—on such occasions he swore horribly. But if it was the enemy who fell, there would be a feast, and a cask of the best wine would be opened.

Could it be that boars, bears, and stags were born without permission, and therefore should be put out of the way? And the men, too, against whom his father fought? The idea troubled him. He was in the same plight as those unlucky enemies. When he grew up, would somebody feel obliged to kill him?

He asked his father about it, timidly, and failing, as a boy will, to articulate the heart of his question. His father replied offhand but positively, that hunting and war are natural. Peter could have asked a question or two more, but at the moment his father was in a hurry. Very well, then. Nature was busy at both ends, at birth and at death; death was always permissible, in fact in-

evitable, but birth was optional and sometimes wrong. Peter became a great hunter. It seemed sensible to work with nature where one is sure to be right.

His brother Gascon, the rightful heir, gave promise of great excellence. His mother called it to the attention of visitors. To begin with, he was good looking; features and figure were beyond praise. When compliments, however, were pronounced in his presence, he endured them with graceful patience, and won repute for extreme modesty. Like Peter he loved dogs and horses, and you couldn't say which was the more ardent hunter, but the neighbors when they spoke of him chose to note rather his employment in good deeds and in what might be called works of propriety. Even as a boy the correctness of his life was phenomenal; his mother spoke of it as divine compensation for certain irregularities in his father's character. Before he fairly reached young manhood he had a solid name. One historian says of him that he invariably liked the things he ought to

like, and disliked whatever the gentle bred disapprove of. We hardly need the additional information that he was prudent. He was scrupulous at his devotions, even after his mother had long ceased to lead him by the hand to Father Constant's lectures. Peter, poor boy, gave up church-going as soon as he was free to imitate his male parent, but Gascon kept on. He said he owed it to his position.

In secular matters too he gave a precocious and shining example. He had a sort of genius for keeping out of doubtful or compromising society. Peter was less fastidious. For him the more roistering of his contemporaries had a special interest, though he only looked on at their wildness, which seemed natural, if one had a taste that way. Gascon wouldn't look on; he studied to avert his eyes from the appearance of evil. The beggars at his father's gate became Peter's loyal and somewhat intimate friends; their adventures profoundly stirred him, and their conversation, to tell truth, had a glamour in it which he missed in the castle

small talk, or in the gossip of the Countess' bower. Gascon never met vagabonds or mendicants if he could help it, not face to face, but he sent out to them daily a charitable greeting of five florins, in very small change, so that even on the most populous mornings each beggar would get something. The beggars, ungrateful like all their kind, preferred Peter, who distributed nothing but his companionship. He would have given coin if he had had any, but gold went through his fingers as smoothly as water. Gascon developed early the instincts of a good steward; once a month he could be found in a corner of the hall, casting up entries of income and outlay.

That was the contrast in the home when the boys reached eighteen or so, a dangerous age for youths of good looks and enterprise, in a wealthy and therefore crowded castle, provided with servants of all ages and of both sexes, therefore with waiting maids who in spite of all precautions might be attractive. Gascon's mother had long ago developed a pardonable technique in chaperonage.

Her husband's vagaries she accounted for by the wickedness of her own sex—desirable men, she held, would always be victims of womankind, unless another woman shielded them. For eighteen years her husband had been shielded. But now with Peter growing up in the house, Peter the child of sin, Peter who undoubtedly inherited woman's wiles as well as man's weakness, she became extraordinarily alert and suspicious. The slightest change of expression on the face of one of her girls, an unwonted gaiety or melancholy, was for her a mystery to probe. At unexpected moments she pursued her housekeeping in remote areas of the castle or the gardens, and surprised the servants out of many an innocent conversation. When she came on Peter one day, talking in the orchard with Maria, a robust and rosy-cheeked scullion, she threatened to have the girl whipped. Peter protested to his father, and the punishment was commuted—Maria was to be sent back to her parents with the first travelers who rode toward her native village. She cried bitterly at the public disgrace.

"What's got into your mother?" said Peter. "The girl was talking to me, and I spoke to her first. What's the crime in that?"

"Well," said Gascon, "I suppose mother wishes to nip the affair in the bud."

"What affair?"

"I wasn't born yesterday—neither were you."

"You're talking riddles," said Peter.

"Well, if you want it in plain words, my father when he was young used to speak to every pretty girl he met. At least, so I've been told."

Peter turned white. So that's what they thought of him! . . . For a time it made him sick of life. He couldn't look Maria in the face—she might have heard their nasty suspicions; he avoided the entire household, in fact—he felt at last what it was to be base born. This elusive behavior of his, Gascon's mother interpreted as conscious guilt. Until the girl should leave the house, she would redouble her vigilance.

One serene summer evening her vigilance justified itself. Passing the miserable closet which

served Maria for sleeping quarters, she heard a man's voice in accents which, as nearly as she could judge through the closed door, were personal and passionate. She pushed her way in, at the cost of the latch. There, in an attitude which only the goddess nature has the right to look on, were Maria and Gascon.

This time Maria got her flogging, besides such other admonitions as made her glad to escape homeward that night with her life. But the angry Countess directed her vengeance chiefly toward Peter. She knew he had led Gascon astray—in fact, had suspected this very thing might happen; to start with, he had bad blood in him, and had reached the age when it would come out; and she had caught him talking to the girl, no doubt plotting mischief; and that incident had called Maria to Gascon's attention, who otherwise would never have noticed her. She asked her husband to send Peter away. The request indeed took the form of a command.

"Aren't you making a good deal of fuss over a

small matter?" said the old Count. "Peter has done nothing wrong—you don't like him, but he's my son, and I shan't throw him out just because his brother kissed a girl."

"But he's leading his brother into sin!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the Count. "My only complaint of Gascon is that his taste is poor. I want quality in my grandchildren."

Though her husband stuck to his point of view, hopelessly vulgar and unspiritual, the Countess let the castle know what she thought about it, and Peter had reason to be sensitive once more to the scandal of his birth. The womenfolk withdrew their eyes when he passed, and the men smiled knowingly. What remarks they must be making behind his back! He reflected that this inconvenience might well enough be borne, if he really had in him those motions toward pleasant wickedness which the Countess had her mind on. Odd that she, whose origin was spotless, thought of such things, while he, unlucky from the first—well, if it weren't for her and Gascon, they never would have entered

his head. He said as much to her, in an exasperated moment.

"Devil's impudence!" she snapped at him. "You don't know the difference between holy thoughts and sinful!"

Perhaps he didn't. He never had got that contrast untangled, between birth and death, and hunting and war. Father Constant's sermon came to mind. In a mood of depression he had the happy impulse to take himself and his cares to the white-haired priest.

"Father, I'm not sure it's my sins I've come to confess, or my stupidity."

"So far, my son, you sound like the most intelligent penitent I've heard in years. What's on your conscience?"

Peter told the story of his birth, which Father Constant well knew, and the unpleasant plight he now found himself in—which likewise his confessor was aware of.

"My son, you were guilty of no sin with this girl?"

In a mood of depression he had the happy impulse to take himself and his cares to the white-haired priest

"I might have been, Father, easily enough, if I'd thought of it, but it never occurred to me."

Father Constant considered.

"My son, the wrong of your birth is not on your conscience—think of it as little as you can. But you'll be reminded of it, God knows. Your lot in life will have its discomforts."

"I understand," said Peter, "it's because I'm a child of nature."

"Who told you that?"

"You, in one of your sermons."

Father Constant looked at him. "My son, you're a child of God."

"Oh, I'm that, of course," said Peter, "but a child of nature besides. That's what's wrong with me."

"With all of us, my son. Our task is to turn nature to good account, and sometimes it's difficult."

"I'd like to know," said Peter, "if it's wrong to think of nature as favorably as I do. Nature is God's work, isn't she?"

"The whole creation, my son."

"Well, I've an idea she's His masterpiece. Birth and death—there isn't anything more remarkable, is there?"

"The soul, which passes through them."

"Oh, I know all that," said Peter cheerfully, "but right here and now, I find nature interesting. Is that an error?"

Father Constant smiled. "Not if you don't forget the Creator meanwhile."

"That's what I was coming to, Father. Nature, that's always bringing new things to life, must be very like the Creator, wouldn't you say? Yet in the sermon you warned us against her, as though she were temptation."

"Son, nature is our opportunity to live, while we're here on earth—in essence neither good nor bad. It's our use of nature which is virtue or sin. You didn't listen to all of my sermon."

"Well, it's a long time ago, and I may have forgotten parts of it, but I gathered that I ought to dislike nature—and I don't."

"If you'll forgive a personal reference," said the priest, "I can illustrate from your experience. Your brother and this girl were animated by a natural impulse, but they did wrong."

"I thought you were going to say it's what my father did."

"Another example, if you care to cite it," said Father Constant.

"Well, if I'm the result of sin, I ought to be pretty bad. That's what the Countess thinks. Am I? I don't feel unusually wicked. Besides, my father was born correctly, wasn't he? And my brother? Look at the way they behave!"

"I'll go into their case when they come to me, my son. You've a special reason for leading a good life—you've suffered from the errors of others."

"That's where my wickedness probably shows, Father—I'm not sure it was an error. If Gascon and Maria love each other, what's the harm? She'd make him a fair enough wife."

Father Constant was a little off his guard. "You want him to marry a kitchen girl?"

"That's not her fault," said Peter, "and she wouldn't be a kitchen girl if he married her."

"Son, you may admire nature, but you know nothing of the world."

Peter took the rebuke modestly. "I'm very ignorant. . . . I wanted to ask you about the other end of it, too."

"Which?"

"Death. Is it right to kill?"

"My son! Have you forgotten the commandment?"

"Then my father shouldn't go to war?"

"Ah—that's different—in a good cause, my son——"

"I thought there probably was a distinction," said Peter. "How about hunting?"

"Nothing against it, so far as the church is concerned. For myself, let me add, my son, that to kill each other, even in war, seems sad work for God's children. To root out the infidel is of course a duty. Wild beasts, not having souls, may be classed with infidels. Yet I should dread to take life with my own hands."

"What puzzles me there," said Peter, " is that I like hunting, where the animal puts up a fight, but sometimes when I look into the face of a beast, I'm not sure it hasn't a soul. Have you noticed the expression I mean? I've hoped my observing it wasn't the exclusive result of my sinful origin. A dog, for example, or a horse, or a rabbit——"

"I've never noticed it in a rabbit," said Father Constant. "There's a particularly vicious one which eats my cabbages. Only last night I set a new trap."

That was all the light he had from the good man. Nature, birth and death, remained mysteries. But to confront one's ignorance is a kind of philosophy. Peter's charitable attitude toward nature included Gascon and Maria, and the animals on his father's estate which obligingly propagated their kind. Where nature was concerned, he concluded, it was idle to judge harshly—or to think too much.

Then he married the Countess of Biscay, a fine lady, brought up in city courts, as cool of temperament as Peter was hearty. Having little to do with

nature, she thought of it a great deal. The day of the wedding, the great bear first appeared in Bearn wood.

Peter was never quite clear as to how the marriage came about. By what seemed an accident, he met the lady at the town of Orthes, where his father repaired, with him for company, to keep the feast of St. Nicholas. His father's sudden interest in St. Nicholas is not obvious. But after the Maria catastrophe the Count had had a brief and very private conversation with his wife, in which he had proposed—with his usual vulgarity, she thought—that what Gascon needed was a wife. Vulgar or not, the idea had its merits, and the Countess collaborated in bringing about the union of her son with the proud sister of the King of Navarre. Gascon had for wedding gift the rich estate of Foix, where he developed a turn for business and state, kept four secretaries busy with his correspondence, and never walked into his dining hall without twelve servants carrying torches before him. There he prospered with his wife the

Princess, until for a sound reason she went on a visit to her brother and never came back. The reason being Catherine.

But Gascon's mother, finding herself left alone with Peter, urged a wife for him too; whatever arguments applied to her admirable son, had double force, she was sure, for this waif and interloper, whose heredity was charged with evil. The Count gave in, to end nagging, and Peter found himself married, and through his father's affection endowed with the wooded lands of Bearn.

Peter's wife had a mind of her own, which fate had not consulted. In a word, she had long admired Gascon. What she liked was his refinement of spirit, the fastidiousness of his soul. She had seen him only a few times, but the impression was indelible. In Peter she discovered, as she feared, a lack of sensitiveness. He spent his days in his woods and in his fields, working like a common fellow. After dinner he went to bed, like a peasant, and was out of the castle before dawn. If she insisted that he spend a modest part of the evening

with her and her ladies, in graceful talk, as befits a gentleman, or listening to a minstrel, he usually fell asleep in his chair. What a life!

They had two children, a son, Peter, and a daughter, Adrienne. Peter would have liked a larger family, but when the girl was born his wife was satisfied.

"A boy and a girl are enough, my dear husband," she said. "I should feel justified in conceding nothing more."

"Conceding?"

"You know what I mean," she said. "Earthly desires must be humored, but it's our duty to tame and limit them. We are immortal beings, Peter, with souls."

Peter had never doubted the soul, and he thought his wife's reference to it was out of place.

"I don't know about the earthly desires," he said, "but I admit I'm fond of children. There's nothing wrong about that, is there? It's certainly natural."

His wife flared up. "It is! It's natural for your dogs and horses to multiply themselves, but

if you hadn't a low streak in you, Peter, you'd regard your wife in a different light."

It crossed Peter's mind that this remark was not without its own vulgarity, but repartee was not his gift. He contented himself with a long inspection of his daughter, cream and pink in her cradle, and later he took his son for a walk to the stables, to see the new puppies. Young Peter reached up and held tight to his fingers. The puppies playing unsteadily in the straw made him wonder how anyone, even with malicious search, had discovered wickedness in nature.

The one activity of his which his wife approved was hunting. The woman took strange pleasure in the slaughter of animals. She liked to see him and his men bring in more venison than the household needed. The walls bristled with antlers and boars' heads, and in every room you stumbled over bear rugs. But she wouldn't be content till he brought her the skin of the big bear which roamed his woods and was becoming a legend in the countryside.

"Your brother," she said, "or anyone else who kept his estate in order, wouldn't leave such a pest at large."

"Pest? What harm does he do? He hasn't killed a single sheep."

"But he will. You'll procrastinate till he does. You'll wait till the children are old enough to run about, and some day, when they've wandered into the forest——"

Her imagination was too much for her, and she had to stop, for tears. It crossed Peter's mind that she was something of a fool, but he didn't like the idea about the children. That afternoon he went into the woods by himself, carrying a knife and a heavy spear. He would look up the beast, and decide what to do.

The forest seemed unusually damp, cool, and silent. It had been a rainy season, and the foliage was thick. The thought came to him that all this growth was strangely futile, the wasted underbrush, the trees crowding each other, the fungus on branches, the mosses beneath his feet. Insects and

reptiles and beasts, uncountable birds—he had never before asked himself why they were there. He must admit that his friend nature was a little reckless. If all this life kept on putting itself forth, wouldn't the result be death? Where the boughs interlocked overhead, the leaves were thin. He stopped to watch a large beetle drag across his path the corpse of a smaller creature, its victim.

His wife's warning had brought on him this mood. Of course, if it was a question of the bear or of his children, he would kill the bear. But it did seem possible for him to stick to his castle and for the bear to stay in the wood. The world wasn't so large as his wife wished, but it was large enough.

As he walked he frightened a robin and her fledglings. It was late in the year for fledglings. Perhaps the cold weather had delayed some of these frail families. The mother bird went frantic at his approach. He pushed through the brush in a wide circle, and left her in peace. Peace! That is, she would now murder a worm and feed her innocent children. . . . Whenever nature caused

one new life to arrive, didn't she at the same time destroy another? Birth was a kind of hunting. Birth was simply the pleasanter face of death.

He didn't like to be so gloomy. He had his health, the children were dear, there was nothing the matter with his wife—why shouldn't he be cheerful?

He looked up and saw the great bear, directly in his path, gazing at him with small, watery eyes. It was as big as an ox. He took a grip on the spear and waited.

But the creature had no hostile intentions—it looked Peter over with a gaze quite amicable, with an assumption as it were of old acquaintance. Those eyes in the vast head were pleading, as though from behind prison bars. If nature had only granted the bridge of speech! Peter had a conviction that the bear and he could have understood each other—two products of reckless desire for which the proper permission had not been asked in advance. Their own permission hadn't been asked, either. Fortune most unjust, to force life upon

you when the other creatures were sure to disapprove.

A large fly was annoying the bear. He ignored Peter long enough to brush his ear with his paw. Then he looked up again, as if to enquire whether the man had further business with him. Peter had none. The brown giant turned clumsily and crashed away into the wood.

At dinner that night Peter was unusually thoughtful, to his wife's annoyance. She had guests in the castle, and a minstrel in to entertain them. Her husband contributed nothing to the talk, he wasn't communicative as to his afternoon's adventures, and his manner of listening to the minstrel suggested endurance rather than delight.

"My husband," she apologized, "has no taste for art."

"I know little about it," admitted Peter, "but this singing is very fine. Let's have another story."

The minstrel felt encouraged. "I'll sing you about Sir Graelent."

"Don't do anything of the kind," said the lady of the house. "That's a silly love-story."

"How would you like the Lay of Yonec? That's about the beautiful prince who changed himself into a bird and flew to the tower where the merchant's daughter was shut up by her unkind father?"

"That's not so bad," said Peter's wife, "but it sounds like another sentimental romance."

"Well, how about the story of Bisclavaret, the husband who was a were-wolf?"

"Ah," said the lady, "that promises well!"

So the minstrel sang of Bisclavaret, and Peter for reason of his own found the tale engrossing. It was about a baron who dwelt in Brittany, a rich man with a handsome wife. You might say they were happy, except that every now and then he absented himself from home, and where he had been he never would tell. Of course his wife got the secret out of him—the poor fellow had to be a wolf once a week; he would go off by himself, lay aside his garments, put on the cursed shape of the beast, and run on all fours till three days were over. Then he could resume his clothing and be-

come a man again. But if by bad luck he should ever fail to find the clothing where he left it, he'd have to remain a wolf for life. Well, when his wife learned that, she contrived to hide his garments the next time he turned wolf, and he never wore human shape again. It is thought she had in mind a gentleman in the neighborhood who had intimated a passion for her, but the minstrel touched lightly on this motive in the story, knowing that his hostess disliked sentiment.

"How beautiful!" she said, as the applause died down. "It makes one feel the mystery of nature."

"That's not nature," said Peter. "That's nonsense. What little nature there is in that story is in the woman's affair with the other man, but there's no mystery about it. There aren't any were-wolves."

"That's only your lack of imagination," said his wife tartly. "Haven't you ever looked into a dog's face, or a horse's, and suspected a soul imprisoned there? It's presumptuous to say that such things aren't possible. I've no doubt at all that many a

wolf in our forest is a cursed soul—they sound like it, winter nights."

"My idea," said Peter, "is that nature can be mysterious enough without the addition of our absurdities. That expression you speak of, in the face of animals, I've noticed—who hasn't? This very afternoon I was having a quiet conversation with a bear."

The company laughed at his whimsical humor.

"I was, I tell you, and I saw the resemblance you speak of. But you say the animals look like us. The fact is, we look like them. The bear was sorry for me—behind my stupid face he saw my soul imprisoned. The minstrel might have brought out the point by telling his story the other way around. It's our conceit that makes us say Bisclavaret was cursed while he was a wolf. A nice wolf would say he was cursed while he had to stay with that treacherous woman. When Bisclavaret lost his clothes, he won his freedom."

The company tittered politely, not knowing what had got into Peter, and his wife, with an air of heroic patience, changed the subject.

She intended to have it out with him next morning after breakfast, but a traveler brought them an annoying piece of gossip which upset the day. He was a mean person, no better than a merchant, and he had forgotten, or never had known, who Peter's relatives were. He blurted right out, as a bit of scandal they'd all enjoy, that the handsome Count Gascon de Foix and his lady had quarreled. In fact, she was about to leave him, according to rumor. Peter's wife rebuked the fellow promptly—one has no right to spread vicious tales about one's betters. She hinted at residence in the dungeon unless he retracted.

"Madam, if the news doesn't interest you, I shouldn't have told it, but it's true. My betters, as you call them, are human beings, and their behavior is what you might expect, if you know the world. But I won't displease you with further details."

"What did the Count do, that his lady should be angry?"

"Madam, I'll leave it there," said the fellow. "I've said too much already."

"You've said what isn't true."

"Isn't it!"

"The Count is one of the finest gentlemen I've known, perhaps the finest," said Peter's wife, with Peter standing by.

"No doubt of it," said the traveler. "Catherine would agree with you."

"Who is Catherine?"

"Madam," said the fellow, enjoying his power, "I shan't tell you unless you positively command me. It's an unpleasant incident, which I prefer not to breathe a syllable about unless I know in advance you'd be glad to hear it."

"You need say no more," interrupted Peter. "I guess the rest."

"But I don't," said his wife. "Who is Catherine?"

"If you insist, Madam, she's one of the Countess' servants, an unusually handsome girl, of high spirits."

"And she thinks the Count is a fine gentleman, does she? Very generous of her! Why should her opinion be asked?"

"There you are!" said the fellow. "Why indeed?"

"This conversation may stop here," said Peter. "The Count de Foix is my brother, and I don't care to have him talked about."

The traveler subsided, a little frightened. "I didn't know——" he began.

"Did you tell the truth?"

"I did, so help me!"

"I suspect," said Peter, "another operation of nature in our family. Is Catherine about to present me with a nephew or a niece?"

The traveler had it on his tongue to confirm the suspicion, but Peter's wife was overtaken with a sudden fit of hysterics, which broke up the conversation.

Peter had her women carry her to her room, and went out to the barnyard, on his morning visit to the live stock. He felt depressed. The human race was discouraging.

It wasn't his intention to mention his brother again to his wife, but she introduced the subject that night, before retiring.

"All day," she said, "I've been thinking of that dreadful woman. Poor Gascon!"

"Waste no tears on him, wife. I know him better than you do. There's something of my father in him. I'm fond of both, and what they do is natural enough, if you care for that sort of thing, but the girl will have a hard time."

"Why shouldn't she? When a woman throws herself at a man——"

"No woman would have to, with Gascon around. The best girl in the world——"

"Only a very bad woman would tempt a man so!" said his wife.

Peter was hit hard. "My mother, whom you didn't know——"

His wife interrupted. "How well did you know her?"

He wondered that anyone could be so cruel, but it was idle to argue. All night he lay awake with difficult thoughts about nature, who, though a universal goddess, plays so readily into the hands of the selfish and the heartless.

The afternoon of the next day he slew the bear. He had just finished his lunch when the shepherd reported that a sheep had been killed, in the grass near the forest.

"And where were you at the time?" said Peter.

"I had turned my back for a moment, no more, and there it was, torn apart."

"You know well enough who did it," said Peter's wife. "I've warned you many a time. Now you'll hunt the beast down and put an end to it."

"Wife, the bear had nothing to do with this."

"Begging your pardon, sir, I think it must have been the bear. I turned my back for just a moment, and there the poor thing lay, a few bloody morsels. If it wasn't the bear, who could it be?"

"You're a fool," said Peter, "and I suspect a liar. You didn't need to steal the sheep—I'd have given you one if you had asked it."

"I stole nothing—I swear I stole nothing—it was the bear! God knows it was the bear!"

"If God does, I don't, you rascal——"

"Peter," said his wife, "either you or I must kill that beast."

"Very well, wife," said Peter, "you may kill it."

She was nettled at the answer, but went out in the yard and summoned the men and the dogs. His servants hesitated to obey, but Peter nodded to let her have her will. She followed them to the woods, out of pride. He for the same reason stayed home.

But some hours later she was back, genuinely frightened.

"Three of the dogs are killed, and one of the men is badly hurt! Peter, you *must* come!"

So he went at last. When he reached the spot, the great bear was holding them at bay, in a wide circle, making no attempt to break through, but turning savagely wherever attack threatened. Under his claws the dogs lay dead, with the heart stripped out of them. Peter got his long spear ready and strode in.

As he approached, the bear gave an angry snarl and rose on its hind legs. The man felt as though

a mountain of fur were falling on him. He took steady aim beneath the left shoulder, and drove the spear with all his strength. At that moment, it seemed to him the bear recognized its friend; certainly the little angry eyes grew astonished and soft, and the terrible paws held themselves spread wide for the blow. Peter felt the spear sink deep into a warm and unresisting life. With its eyes still on him, the huge mass collapsed and fell.

He turned to his men. "Well, that's a quick end!" His voice was a bit unsteady. He noticed that they made no sound of joy or of congratulation; they were looking at him queerly—their eyes like the eyes of the dead bear.

"Bring my wife to see her enemy," he said.

"She's not here, sir," said the frightened shepherd. "She ran home."

"Well, bring the bear home too, then. She'll want to look at it."

When they had carried the prey to the castle, they spread out the creature on the stones of the courtyard, and Peter called his wife to come and

see. She walked out of the door quite pale, and when she saw the bear's face, she gave an audible gasp, and covered her eyes. Peter foresaw hysterics.

"Now what in heaven's name is wrong? Isn't this what you wanted me to do?"

"I am not feeling well," she said, "and the sight of blood is distasteful."

Her eyes, too, as she spoke, seemed to him like the eyes of the dead bear.

"Wife," he began, but she went off to her room crying.

His men were watching him.

"Get busy and skin the beast," said Peter. "The world has gone mad, but we'll have some fine steaks out of this, and a splendid rug."

His cheerfulness wasn't contagious. He presided at dinner alone—his wife was indisposed. The servants went about frightened and spoke in lowered tones.

In the middle of the night he rose from his bed, with a sharp groan, and in the darkness began

fencing with an invisible foe. The noise he made brought in the household with candles. They could see he was fast asleep, for all his leaping and slashing. They got him into bed again, and in the morning nothing was said about it. But that day his wife went off with young Peter and with Adrienne, to visit her cousin, the King of Castile.

Peter waited for her to come back—waited till he was an old man. His men used to tell how even in his last years, when he was feeble, he would get out of his bed at night, grasp an imaginary spear, and thrust at something unseen. When the spear had gone home he would fall in a faint, and they'd put him back in his bed. By day he was gentle enough, kind to his dogs, inclined to be silent and a little wistful.

THE END

CINDERELLA'S DAUGHTER

A good story often ends too soon. Perhaps that's what makes it a good story. But when we have people so well known as Cinderella, Lady Godiva, Beanstalk Jack, Patient Griselda, Beauty and the Beast, and Sleeping Beauty, we can't help feeling that there's more to be said.

How did that famous marriage of Cinderella and the Prince turn out? Was the romance permanent? How about the two spiteful sisters?

Or that spectacular ride of Godiva's—wasn't there more to report, even excluding anything that Peeping Tom might have to contribute? In fact, may it not be true that legend has done shabby justice to poor Tom? And to the emotions of the Lady's husband, not to mention her own emotions the next day when she went to town, this time fully clothed, to do a bit of shopping?

It is with such "sequels and consequences" that John Erskine has dealt in the eight stories that compose this book. As always in the case of the author of *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* the wit arises out of a sardonic understanding of human character, and the entertaining situations of these sequels seem inevitably consequent upon the sober implications of the original tales.

It is a book to start the fancy upon a hundred amusing conjectures.